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LIFE OF RENAN.

LIFE

OF

ERNEST RENAN

BY

FRANCIS ESPINASSE

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LIFE OF RENAN.

CHAPTER I.

[1823-36.]

JOSEPH ERNEST RENAN was, like Chateaubriand and Lamennais, a native of Celtic Brittany, the Wales, so to speak, of France. He was born on the 28th February 1823, at Tréguier (*Côtes du Nord*), a little town at the southern extremity of a bay and a few miles from the English Channel, with a harbour frequented by vessels engaged in the coasting trade. The ancestors of Ernest Renan came, it is supposed, to Brittany in the great migration thither during the fifth century from Wales, and one of the migrants was St. Renan (originally Ronan), a famous Breton saint, after whom was named, among other places, the town of St. Renan in Finisterre.

In the registry of births at Tréguier Renan's father is

described as a *marchand-épicier* (retail grocer). But, like his immediate progenitors, he was also a mariner, the owner of a coasting vessel and of the house in which his son was born. The wife managed the shop, a "general" one, in which, besides groceries, were sold the miscellaneous articles in demand by seafaring men and their wives. According to Ernest Renan, one of the chief characteristics of the Bretons is "idealism which brings with it a contempt for riches because generally acquired by ignoble means, and produces an incapacity for trade and commerce." In this respect the modern Renans were true Bretons: "they were all as poor as Job," was the pithy description given of them to Ernest by his mother. His paternal grandfather was a "patriot" after the first French revolution broke out. But though he had then a little money, he refused, unlike his neighbours, to have anything to do with the purchase of the confiscated property of the Royalists as an investment vitiated by its origin. In the ensuing war with England Ernest's father volunteered for the naval service, and was taken prisoner by the English. In later years he was fond of witnessing the drawing of conscripts by lot, and delighted in reproaching the new recruits with the contrast between his voluntary and their compulsory enlistment. "In the old days this was not our way of doing things," and he shrugged his shoulders over the degeneracy of the times. A "mild and melancholy" man, he had the true Renan incapacity for business. He was in his fiftieth year, and had just returned from a long voyage, when Ernest was born. At his birth things were going ill with the family. "When you came into the

world," the mother told her son, after she had lived to see him a distinguished man, "we were so downcast that I took you on my knees and cried bitterly." Cheerfulness, however, was her ordinary mood. Through her father she had Gascon blood in her veins, and inherited the joyous Gascon temperament, the very opposite of that of the sombre Breton. "This complexity of origin," Renan says, "is in a great measure the cause of my apparent inconsistencies. I am of twofold nature; one part of me laughs, while the other weeps. As there are in me two men, one of them is always bound to be contented." He says somewhere that the Gascon element gained the upper hand in him; but this was in later years; in earlier he approved himself, it will be seen, a genuine Breton.

The distress of the Renan family reached a climax with the disastrous death of its head when Ernest was a child of five. His father was drowned one dark night while returning to his coasting vessel from the quay at St. Malo. The creditors waived their claim to dispose of the house and shop at Tréguier in consideration of the offer made by Ernest's sister, Henriette, a clever and resolute girl of fifteen, to pay off her father's debts by degrees. For twenty years, beginning by opening a school for little boys and girls at Tréguier, she added to her struggles for herself and her family the trying fulfilment of this self-imposed obligation. Henriette inherited her father's melancholy, and, while sympathetic, cultivated solitude. She was passionately attached to her brother Ernest, and afterwards gave him spiritual guidance as well as material aid. She had been qualified

for teaching through having been tolerably taught French and church-Latin by one of the *ci-devant* nuns who had survived the suppression of the convents during the first French Revolution.

The death of his father first brought the little Ernest into a semblance of relations with one of the many saints revered in Brittany. This was St. Yves, who as a lawyer pleaded the cause of the poor, and after an ecclesiastical career received what is said to be the unique honour bestowed on a lawyer, that of being canonised. He became the patron-saint of lawyers, and was regarded in his native district of Tréguier as the champion of the poor, of the widow and the orphan, and as the great redresser of wrongs. To his chapel near Tréguier came the injured one, and having said to him, "Thou wert just in thy lifetime; show that thou art so still," after this appeal went away with the comfortable though rather unchristian belief that the enemy prayed against would die within the year. All the desolate and forsaken became his wards. The fatherless Ernest was taken by his mother to the chapel of the saint and was constituted his ward. "I cannot say," Renan wrote long afterwards, "that the good saint worked marvels in the management of our affairs, or, above all, that he endowed me with a remarkable understanding of my own interests. But I owe him what is better. He gave me a contentment which passeth riches, and a good nature which has kept me cheerful until now."

After various changes of residence, mother, daughter, and son found themselves again at Tréguier. The boy,

very intelligent as well as dreamy, had been taught to read and almost knew Télémaque by heart when, probably about the age of eight, he was placed in the ecclesiastical seminary of his native town, a friendly priest and his good sister (of her more hereafter) paying his school-fees, from which slender burden he soon relieved them by gaining a small scholarship. The teachers were venerable priests, for whom, long after he had ceased to believe in their narrow creed, and had recognised the insufficiency of their programme of secular instruction, he cherished the warmest and most grateful regard. They taught him Latin in the old-fashioned way, "out of detestable elementary books, without method, almost without grammar, just as it was learned in the fifteenth and sixteenth century by Erasmus and the humanists, who since the time of the ancients have known it best." He was thoroughly grounded in mathematics. The writing of Latin verses was encouraged, but that of French verses was sternly forbidden. Even Chateaubriand was distrusted, since, although he had written the *Génie du Christianisme*, was he not also the author of such mundane fictions as *Atala* and *René?* The suspicions entertained of Lamartine were still stronger. They doubted the soundness of his faith and foresaw his ultimate outbreaks. "All these views did credit to their orthodox sagacity, but the result was for their pupils a singularly contracted horizon." What history they learned was from Rollin, and so rigorously excluded were they from any knowledge of recent history, that on the eve of the Revolution of 1830, Renan knew scarcely anything more of Napoleon and

the Empire than he gathered from the gossip of the college-porter. For the rest, Renan says:—

"I learned from my teachers something infinitely more valuable than criticism or philosophical sagacity. They taught me the love of truth, respect for reason, and the seriousness of life. This is the one thing in me which has never varied. I issued from their hands with a moral feeling so proof against all trials that the jewel might be rudely handled but could not be tarnished by contact with Parisian levity. I was so fashioned for the Good, for the True, that it would have been impossible for me to follow any career not devoted to incorporeal things. My teachers made me so unfitted for any and every temporal employment that I was irrevocably stamped for a spiritual life. That life appeared to me as alone noble; every lucrative profession seemed servile and unworthy of me."

Ernest's fellow-pupils were chiefly of the peasant class, and for the most part learning with an eye to the priesthood. They were proud of their bodily strength, and somewhat contemptuous of femineity and of what they thought effeminacy. Ernest was a delicate and studious boy. He did not join in the games of his schoolfellows, and they were given to teasing "Mademoiselle," as they scornfully called him. From an early age, indeed, he preferred the company of little maidens to that of children of his own sex. Of these damsels, the one who fascinated him most, and with whom he formed a childish friendship, was the Noëmi charmingly described in his *Souvenirs*. She was two years older than himself. Had it not been for the consciousness of a coming vocation which ought to detach him from all earthly things, he would in a few years have fallen in love with Noëmi, before the parting of their paths in life and her premature death. He held her memory dear, and when he became

a father he called his only daughter Noëmi. But thoughts of love, still less of marriage, could not be harboured by one destined, as he and his believed, for the priesthood and celibacy. "I was a born priest," he says of himself, and a priest he did become, though it was not in any of the churches of the nations. Meanwhile, just as melted wax takes the impression of the seal, his natural devoutness took the shape given it by his spiritual pastors and masters. "Every word of theirs seemed to me an oracle. Such was my respect for them that, until I was sixteen and came to Paris, I never doubted the truth of what they told me."

Beyond the school-walls there was much to minister to the boy's natural and acquired devoutness, which was strongly tinged with romanticism. Before the first French Revolution Tréguier was the seat of a bishopric, and was full of monasteries and convents. The Revolution swept away the bishopric and much else that was clerical and monastic. But under the Empire and the Restoration, Tréguier recovered to a great extent its old ecclesiastical aspect. There was the ancient cathedral, reconstructed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the young Renan passed many a happy hour in it, especially in its noble cloisters, with their tombs of knights and dames of the olden time. Outside Tréguier, as elsewhere in Brittany, with its devoutest and most superstitious of populations, clinging tenaciously to ancient worships and ways, there were in lonely and desert places numbers of half-ruined chapels, dedicated to local saints unknown to the rest of Christendom, and to whom, worshipping them with strange rites, the Breton peasant

prayed for a cure of this and the other disease; the clergy tolerating such practices reluctantly. When Renan wrote his *Souvenirs*, he remembered vividly his emotion when, through a half-ruined door of one of those chapels, he gazed at the stained glass or the images of painted wood which decorated the altar. "The strange and terrible physiognomies of those saints, more Druid than Christian, savage, vindictive, haunted me like a nightmare." Most of them had been real persons, but their biographies had become the subjects of the wildest of legends. A very strange one was connected with an incident in Ernest's own family. He was told how his father, when a child, had been cured of a fever. On the day appointed he was taken, before dawn, to the chapel of the saint from whom the cure was expected. At the same time came a blacksmith with forge, nails, and tongs. He lighted his furnace, made his tongs red-hot, and holding them before the image of the saint, said: "If thou dost not draw forth the fever from this child, I shall forthwith shoe thee as I would a horse!" The saint obeyed immediately! Ernest's mother as a Breton liked the legends of the saints, but as a Gascon she laughed at the grotesque in them, and when telling them to her eagerly listening son, she took care to distinguish between what might be real and what was certainly fictitious in them—a lesson not thrown away upon him when in after years he had to deal with legends infinitely more important and widely accepted than those of the obscure saints of Brittany. These stories "gave me early," Renan says, "a taste for mythology," and some of them were utilised by him long afterwards when engaged

in one of his favourite occupations, that of tracing the resemblance between the workings of the mythopœic faculty in races far apart from each other in space and time.

But for an unexpected incident Renan would have spent an obscure and blameless life as a parish priest, or at highest as a professor in the College of Tréguier. He was in his fourteenth year when something which had occurred in distant Paris substituted for that modest career one very different.

The old Seminary of St. Nicolas du Chardonnet, close to the church of the same name, in the Rue St. Victor, and one of the poorest quarters of transpontine Paris, became with Napoleon's re-establishment of Catholicism in France a training-school for priests of the diocese of Paris. Through too frequent changes in the principalship, ending in the intermittent and feeble administration of a valetudinarian, the teaching and discipline of the seminary had rendered it inefficient for its object, and the number of pupil-inmates was dwindling accordingly.[1] About 1837 the Archbishop of Paris, in order to reform this state of things, gave the seminary a vigorous Superior in the person of the Abbé Dupanloup, afterwards the rather famous Bishop of Orleans. In the prime of life, and perhaps the most popular preacher in Paris, ambitious, and a man of the world, he was at that time an ultramontane and a legitimist, and had been confessor to the Duc de Bourdeaux. But he found favour in the eyes of Orleanists as well as of legitimists of distinction, and was admitted to intimacy by the

[1] Adolphe Morillon, *Souvenirs de Saint-Nicolas* (1859), chap. i.

Duchesse de Dino, the high-born Russian wife of Talleyrand's nephew. One of Dupanloup's greatest achievements of those years was the successful stroke of spiritual diplomacy by which he managed to persuade the dying and long recalcitrant Talleyrand to receive the last sacraments, and sign a confession of faith. Among his first endeavours in the administration of the seminary was to provide a classical and literary education for aspirants to the priesthood, at the expense of the scholastic and mystical instruction previously given. But he carried out a still more vital change. He determined that the seminary should be no longer a mere training-school for the priesthood, but that there should be admitted youths belonging to the wealthy middle-class, and to the higher class, whose parents desired them to have, without any view to taking orders, at once a sound Catholic and a superior classical and literary education. He was thoroughly successful. No sooner had he effected these internal reforms than he was besieged by applications for the admission of boys belonging to aristocratic families as well as to the wealthier *bourgeoisie*. Many parents were willing to pay a high price for the privilege, and their payments went to aid the education and support of boys of an inferior social grade who were, or were likely to become, candidates for the priesthood. These, moreover, were to be youths of proved or promising ability. To obtain such the Abbé Dupanloup sent forth to several parts of France educational recruiting sergeants, so to speak. Let Renan tell in his own words the rest of the story:—

"In the year 1838,[1] as it happened, I won all the prizes of my class in the College of Tréguier. The list of prizes came under the notice of one of the men of penetration whom the zealous general employed to recruit for his young army. In a minute my fate was decided. 'Make him come,' said the impetuous Superior. I was fifteen-and-a-half: we had no time for reflection. On the 4th of September I was spending my holidays with a friend, at a village near Tréguier. In the afternoon I was sent for in haste. I remember the return home as if it were yesterday. I had before me a country-walk of a league. The pious chimes of the evening Angelus, spreading from parish to parish, infused into the atmosphere something of calmness, of sweetness, of melancholy, imaging the life which I was about to quit for ever. Next day I started for Paris; and on the 7th I beheld things as new to me, as if I had been suddenly flung into France from Tahiti or Timbuctoo."

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[1] Renan himself says, "1836," a misprint or a slip of the pen. A few lines further on he was then, he says, fifteen-and-a-half years old, and he was born in 1823. Moreover, it is certain (see Morillon, *ubi supra*) that the Abbé Dupanloup did not become Superior of the seminary before the session 1837-38.

CHAPTER II.

[1838-45.]

HIS seven years of study, begun with a view to the priesthood, are described by Renan pretty fully in his *Souvenirs*. Moreover, some side-lights on his career as a Seminarist are thrown by one of his most intimate friends and fellow-students of those years, who, unlike Renan, did enter the priesthood. The comments of the Abbé Cognat on Renan's reminiscences of his student-life display a certain acidity, due to Renan's abandonment of his early belief, but in the Abbé's recollections (given in *Le Correspondant* during 1883) are embedded facts and impressions which supplement, in a more or less interesting way, Renan's own statements. Here, for instance, is an unflattering sketch of the personal appearance and characteristics of the Breton boy when he entered the Seminary of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet: "He looked pale and sickly. His puny frame was surmounted by an enormous head. His eyes, almost always downcast, were raised only to give sidelong glances. Timid to awkwardness, pensive to the verge of dumbness, he seemed a burden to himself," etc. Renan has himself

described his misery on being transplanted from his quiet home and his mother's side, from Tréguier with its environment of green hills and pleasant fields, to the school-prison of the Rue St. Victor, with its rigid discipline and indoors confinement. Home-sickness was followed by bodily sickness, and but for a fortunate incident things might have gone very ill with the poor boy. His chief consolation was to write long letters to his mother, the loss of whose companionship was his greatest sorrow. It so happened that the Abbé Dupanloup was deeply attached to his own mother, whom he visited every day. All letters written by the pupils were read by masters before being despatched. The deep affectionateness of one of Renan's to his mother made an impression on the master who read it, and he brought it under the notice of the Abbé Dupanloup. He received it on the evening which he was wont to devote to commenting, before the assembled and eagerly listening two hundred pupils, on the masters' reports and on the school incidents of the week. Renan had that week been unsuccessful with his school exercise, and was only fifth or sixth in the order of merit. "Ah," said the Abbé Dupanloup, "if the subject had been that of a letter which I read this morning, Ernest Renan would have been first." "Thenceforth," Renan adds, "he took notice of me. I existed for him; he was for me what he was for all of us, a principle of life, a sort of God. One worship was substituted for another, and weakened considerably my feelings towards my first teachers."

In the vivifying studies of the place, in the ardour of emulation, and in the sympathetic communings of the

Abbé Dupanloup with the pupils, Renan soon found his home-sickness vanish. The studies were purely literary, but their range was wide, and the Abbé, seconded by excellent teachers, practised every possible device that could make school-tasks interesting to the learners. Greek and Latin were carefully taught, and the classics of Greece and Rome instructively commented on. History too, ancient, mediæval, and modern, had a foremost place in the school studies along with the great French classics, Bossuet and Fénelon in particular. "I had finished my classical studies," Renan says, "without having read Voltaire, but I knew by heart the *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*," full of orthodoxy and legitimism. News and knowledge of what was being said and done in literary Paris entered the seminary so amply that the war then raging between the Romanticists and the Classicists was a frequent theme of the familiar addresses made for half-an-hour every evening by the Abbé Dupanloup to the assembled pupils. On this subject the Abbé Cognat has something rather malicious to say of his old friend and fellow-pupil *à propos* of Renan's statement in his *Souvenirs*, that writing exercises on themes not personally interesting to him was distasteful, and that he gladly turned from rhetoric to history. According to the Abbé, Renan was distinguished thus early by a "literary heterodoxy," that is, by a passionate preference of the Romanticists to the Classicists. In order to check this devotion, which was prominently illustrated in the young gentleman's exercises, one of these was, to the great amusement of his fellow-pupils, ridiculed by his teacher, who laughed at what the Abbé calls "the youthful innovator's prose,

pretentious, trivial, and bristling with neologisms." Further, according to the Abbé, Renan adhered to his romanticism, but in dudgeon abandoned "the serious study of letters," and devoted all his energies to history, in which department, adds this candid friend, "finding himself in company with rivals less prepared than himself, he easily obtained the first place." Certainly to history he did turn with avidity, and long afterwards he remembered the delight with which he listened while his Professor read out striking extracts from the fifth and sixth volumes of Michelet's History of France, those in which is told, among other things, the story of Joan of Arc, and the expulsion of the English from France, where of all their former possessions Calais alone was left them.

Of the religious observances of the seminary and the part which he took in them, Renan says in his *Souvenirs* little or nothing. Speaking of the Abbé Dupanloup's system of education, Renan remarks, "You would have said that his two hundred pupils were destined to be poets, authors, orators." But with all his classicism the future Bishop of Orleans made the most ample provision for the spiritual needs of those entrusted to his charge, whether they were destined for the priesthood or not. A glance at this sphere of things is given by the severe Abbé Cognat when commenting on a passage in the *Souvenirs*, in which Renan contrasts the simple austere religion of his priest-teachers at Tréguier with that presented to him at St. Nicolas, "a religion of calico-print, a piety scented with musk, decked out with ribbons."

"If such," says the critical Abbé, "was M. Renan's impression on entering the Seminary in 1838, it must be admitted that he was an excellent dissembler and played his game skilfully. At chapel, from the beginning of the service, he took his place among the most serious and devout. By his piety he even made himself a place apart in the opinion of his fellow-pupils and his masters. In this way he did not fail to receive encouragement and distinction. I have not forgotten with what an envious eye I saw my friend among the dignitaries of the Fraternity of the Holy Virgin, which was established in the Seminary, when I myself had as yet, and with great difficulty, attained the modest grade of aspirant in that pious institution. And it was not only at chapel where, like another Eliakin, invested with the linen alb, 'decked out with ribbons' the colours of the Virgin, he discharged the envied functions of chorister, that M. Renan figured as the fervid disciple of a 'religion of calico-print,'—during play-hours, at class-time, and everywhere, he appeared to be animated by a feeling of sincere devoutness. I have had the curiosity to consult the honourably-mentioned exercises in which were given the best of those produced in each class from 1838 to 1841, and I was not surprised to find among several other religious compositions of Ernest Renan a hymn in Greek verse to the Virgin. I add a detail apparently trifling, yet characteristic: M. Renan never neglected to introduce a cross into his signature."

Nevertheless, when he left the Seminary of St. Nicolas du Chardonnet a great change had been worked in the young Renan.

"For three years," Renan writes, "I was subjected to a profound influence which effected a complete transformation of my being. M. Dupanloup had literally transfigured me. He had evolved a quick and active intelligence out of the poor little provincial torpidly encased in his shell. Certainly there was something wanting to this education, and as long as I had to put up with it my mind always felt a void. There were wanting positive science, the idea of a critical search after truth. That superficial humanism for three years condemned my reasoning faculty to inertia, while at the same

time destroying the original simplicity of my faith. My Christianity underwent a process of great diminution; nevertheless, there was nothing in my mind which as yet could be called doubt. Every year, with the holidays, I went to Brittany. In spite of more than one perturbation, I found myself again wholly what my first teachers had made me, in regard to religion at least."

With the close of his studies at St. Nicolas, Renan stood at the parting of the ways. Of his fellow-pupils who had arrived at the same stage, many embraced a secular career. Many also, bent on becoming priests, resolved to continue their studies in a purely ecclesiastical seminary, and among them were Renan and his then young friend, afterwards the Abbé Cognat.

The Seminary of St. Sulpice, which Renan now entered as an aspirant to the priesthood, had a branch establishment at Issy, near Paris. Here the student devoted two years to "philosophy" before receiving a mainly theological training at headquarters in Paris. Life at Issy was very different from that led at the Seminary St. Nicolas. The students being young men from eighteen to twenty-four, and having selected from choice a sacred vocation, nothing of the discipline known at St. Nicolas was enforced on them, and they did not abuse the liberty allowed them. Moreover, anything like emulation was sternly discouraged; intellectual modesty and self-repression were among the things chiefly encouraged. For the varied literary culture of St. Nicolas was substituted scholasticism, a Cartesianism mitigated *à la* Bossuet, and further modified by the psychology of Thomas Reid and the Scottish School, with lectures on physics, natural history, and physiology. Renan's favourite

reading was in Pascal, Malebranche, Euler, Locke. He was an ardent student, spending the recreation-hours in reading and meditation, and during his two years at Issy never once availing himself of the permission frequently given to visit Paris. The results of his studies and meditations he has summarised thus:—

"The vivid attraction which philosophy had for me did not blind me to the uncertainty of its results. I early lost all confidence in the abstract metaphysics which claims to be a science outside all other sciences, and able to solve by itself alone the highest problems of humanity. The basis of my nature was the scientific spirit. . . . I had received from my first teachers in Brittany a pretty deep mathematical education. Mathematics and physical induction have ever been the fundamental elements of my intellect, the only stones of my mental masonry which have never changed position and which always avail me. What of general natural history and of physiology I learned initiated me into the laws of life. I perceived the insufficiency of so-called spiritualism. The Cartesian proofs of the existence of a soul distinct from the body always appeared to me to be very weak. Thenceforward I was an idealist, and not a spiritualist in the usual meaning of the word. An eternal *fieri*, an endless metamorphosis seemed to me to be the law of the world. Nature appeared to me as a whole in which there is no room for special creation, and in which consequently everything is in course of transformation. How was it that such a conception, already tolerably clear to me, of a positive philosophy, did not expel from my mind scholasticism and Christianity? It was because I was young, inconsequent, and lacking the critical spirit. I was kept back by the example of such a number of great intellects with so profound an insight into nature, which nevertheless had remained Christian. I thought above all of Malebranche, who celebrated the mass all his life, while holding and expressing as to the providential government of the world ideas little different from mine. . . . Indeed, I cannot say that my Christian belief was in reality diminished. My faith was destroyed by historical criticism,

not by scholasticism or philosophy. The history of philosophy and the kind of scepticism by which I was attacked retained me in Christianity rather than repelled me from it. . . . A certain modesty kept me back. That question of questions, the truth of the Christian dogmas and of the Bible, never obtruded itself on me. I admitted revelation in a general sense, like Leibnitz and Malebranche. Certainly my philosophy of the *fieri* was heterodoxy itself, but I did not follow out its consequences. After all, my teachers were satisfied with me."

Nor had these excellent men—to whose piety, ethical purity, and kindness of heart Renan does due justice—any reason to be dissatisfied with him. He appeared to them a modest and devout, an intelligent and studious young man, in whom anything which they could have wished to be otherwise was an over-devotion to study, since this might somewhat unfit him for the active duties of the priesthood. At Issy, according to his friend Cognat, his piety was more fervent than ever; at chapel and in the religious exercises of the place he appeared absorbed in prayer, and he was a fervent communicant. His teachers had not the slightest suspicion of what was passing half unconsciously in the depths of his mind until it was suddenly revealed to one, the most keen-sighted of them, and the shock which it gave him was felt as vividly by Renan himself. Among the privileges enjoyed by the young seminarists of Issy was a considerable liberty of discussion, although the theological teaching given was of the most dogmatic orthodoxy. Every Sunday the students assembled to hear theses defended and impugned. At other times one of the most silent of the community, Renan appears to have been generally an impugner, and his aggressive attitude made the Professor

already referred to keep a vigilant eye on the champion who thus delighted in contesting the positions of orthodoxy. On one occasion—Renan does not say what was precisely the subject of the thesis which he attacked—he put his objections so forcibly, and the replies to them were so feeble, as to produce symptoms of amusement among the auditors. The Professor present on the occasion was alarmed, and abruptly closed the discussion. In the evening he took Renan aside, and spoke earnestly to him, in the strain to be expected, about reliance on reason as being unchristian and so forth. He reproached the young man with his love of study. This perpetual seeking after truth—what is the good of it? "All that is essential has been already found. It is not knowledge that saves souls." And then, adds Renan, "gradually exciting himself," he said, in a passionate tone, "You are not a Christian!"

This terrible apostrophe was to the sensitive and conscientious young man like a thunderbolt falling at his feet. All night long he kept repeating to himself the fateful words. Next day he confided his agonised thoughts to the principal of the Issy establishment, who was also his confessor, an old and extremely amiable ecclesiastical gentleman, much attached to Renan. He took the matter rather lightly, and was even a little displeased with the plain-spoken Professor for having troubled the conscience of one for whose spiritual condition he, as Renan's confessor, was responsible. His comfortable and comforting theory was that a young man's theological doubts were of little importance unless they were persisted in, and that they dis-

appeared when the duties of the priesthood and a definite career were entered on. After the incident Renan found him more affectionate than ever. Another trusted Professor took the matter calmly, and only admonished Renan not to allow his faith in Christianity to be disturbed by "objections of detail." The upshot was a decision that when Renan had finished his two years course of "philosophy" at Issy, he should proceed to headquarters, the Seminary of St. Sulpice in Paris, and by following the prescribed course of theological and cognate studies qualify himself for the priesthood. Renan without demur accepted the decision, and acted on it so far as to proceed to St. Sulpice, with what result will be seen further on. But when nearly forty years afterwards he wrote his *Souvenirs* he admitted the penetration of the Professor who had read him more accurately than Renan had read himself. He regretted that he had not profited by the warning indirectly given him, and had not resolved on abandoning the career which a residence at St. Sulpice pledged him to adopt. He even fancied that if, with his love for physiology and the natural sciences, he had studied them persistently he might have arrived at some of the results which were obtained by Darwin, and of which in those early years, he avers, glimpses were vouchsafed to him.

To St. Sulpice Cognat accompanied Renan, with whom he remained for several years afterwards, and had been for several years before, on terms of close and confidential intimacy. It is Cognat who discloses concerning his friend's arrival and residence at St. Sulpice several significant facts to which Renan in his *Souvenirs*

has made no reference. When a Seminarist left Issy for St. Sulpice he was preceded by some written remarks, in which his old teachers, for the benefit of his new teachers, commented on his character and conduct. In this document the Superior of the Issy Seminary, who is represented by Renan as having treated his doubts so lightly, indicated to the head of the St. Sulpice Seminary certain undefined but dangerous intellectual tendencies as having been detected in Renan, a careful supervision of whom was recommended. The suggestion was acted on, but with no other result than the knowledge that the young man was a model Seminarist, answering questions in his class without displaying the slightest taint of heresy, gentle to his fellow-students, respectful to his teachers, and earnestly devoted to study. In discharging one function, indeed, which was assigned to him, doubtless as a preparative for the active duties of the priesthood, he seems to have broken down. He was commissioned to catechise the young people of the parish of St. Sulpice, but he did this with so little satisfaction to his superiors that they relieved him of the duty. Cognat adds as a proof of Renan's humility that he accepted his supersession without complaining and as warranted by the circumstances. The precise cause of his failure is not given, nor is it hinted, at least by Cognat, that it was due to any exhibition of heterodoxy. Renan was punctual and earnest in his public devotions, and there was nothing in his conduct to make his superiors suspicious of his sincerity. But in the inmost recesses of his mind he was beginning to be greatly disquieted by a doubt whether his theory of the universe, and certain conclusions at

which he was arriving concerning the dogmas of Roman Catholicism, could be honestly reconciled with the assumption of even the slenderest ecclesiastical functions. He accepted the tonsure and took those minor orders which did not pledge him to celibacy, or advance him further than the threshold, so to speak, of the priesthood. But if he remembered rightly what was his consciousness at the time, it was with vital reservations that he went thus far. A year or two later, in one of those letters to his friend Cognat, which are deeply interesting contributions to Renan's spiritual autobiography, and of which further use will be made hereafter, he thus described his feelings when he took his first step towards the priesthood :—

"At the moment when I advanced to the altar to receive the tonsure, terrible doubts were already working within me. But I was pushed forward, and was told that it is always good to obey. Therefore I went forward. But I call on God to bear testimony to the inmost thought which possessed me, and to the vow which I made in the depths of my heart. I took for my portion the truth which is the hidden God. I consecrated myself to its quest; renouncing for its sake whatever is only profane, whatever can turn man away from the holy and divine destination to which his nature summons him. It was thus that I heard nature speak, and my soul assured me that I should never repent of my promise. And, my friend, I do not repent of it, and constantly with perfect happiness I repeat the delightful and pleasant words, *Dominus pars* ('The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance,' etc., Psalm xvi. 5), and I believe myself to be thus quite as agreeable to God as he who pronounces them with a vain heart and a frivolous mind. Only in one event will they be a reproach to me, and that is if, prostituting my mind to vulgar cares, I should allow my life to be shaped by one of those gross motives which suffice the common herd, and should prefer meaner enjoyments to the holy pursuit of truth and beauty. Until that happens, my friend, I shall recall without

regret the memory of the day on which I pronounced those words. Man can never be so sufficiently assured of the course of his thoughts as to swear fidelity to this or that system, which for the time being he may regard as the true one. All that he can do is to consecrate himself to the service of Truth, whatever she may be, and to incline his heart to follow her wherever he thinks that he sees her, and this though at the cost of the most painful sacrifices."

A touching *apologia* for a momentary lapse from perfect truthfulness. When, however, it came to taking sub-deacon's orders, which pledged to celibacy and bound irrevocably to the service of the Church, Renan recoiled, though pressed to take the step by his spiritual director at St. Sulpice, who doubtless thought that if that happened the young man would succeed in stifling his doubts and scruples. To a young friend at Tréguier, who after some hesitation had taken orders, Renan, in March 1845, between two and three years after his admission to St. Sulpice, and just entering his twenty-third year, thus unbosomed himself when announcing what proved to be a fateful decision:—

"Nothing would be wanting to my happiness were it not for the deeply distressing thoughts by which my mind is tormented, and which increase at a frightful rate of progression. I have quite decided not to enter the sub-diaconate at the next ordination. No one will think that singular, since my age would compel me to allow an interval to elapse between my first and second ordination. After all, what does the opinion of others matter to me? I must accustom myself to brave it, so that I may be prepared for any and every sacrifice. Many a cruel moment do I pass. This Holy Week, above all, has been for me a painful one, since whatever snatches me from my ordinary course of life submerges me again in anxiety. I console myself by thinking on Jesus, on him so beautiful, so pure, so ideal in his sufferings, whom under every hypothesis

I shall always love. Even did I arrive at abandoning Him, that ought to please Him, for it would be a sacrifice to conscience, and, God knows, a costly one. You, I think, will understand it. Oh! my friend, how little is man free to choose his destiny. Here is a child who acts only from impulse and imitation, and yet it is at such an age that he is made to stake his whole life. A power higher than himself enmeshes him in indissoluble toils, silently carries on its work, and before he has begun to know himself he is bound he knows not how. At a certain age he awakes, he wishes to act. Impossible! He is bound hand and foot in a network from which no extrication is possible. It is God himself who holds him fast. The merciless opinion of others converts the fancies of his childhood into an irrevocable decree, and will laugh at him if he desires to be done with the toy which amused his earliest years. Ah! if it were only the general verdict! But all the dearest ties are in the tissue of the net which surround him, and he must tear out half his heart if he is to liberate himself from it. How often have I wished that man at his birth were either wholly free or wholly without freedom! He would be less to be pitied if he were born like the plant, unalterably attached to the soil which is to nourish it. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? How is all this to be reconciled with the supreme government of a Father? Mysteries are these, my friend. Happy he who has to fathom them only in speculation.

"For me to tell you all this, you must indeed be my friend. I need not ask you to preserve silence. You understand that my mother must be tenderly dealt with. I would rather die than cause her a moment of pain. O God, shall I have strength to give duty a preference over her? I commend her to you."

Externally, there was nothing to betray the terrible conflict, thus touchingly described, which was raging in the young man's breast. He performed all his duties, and took part in the services of the Church as punctually as ever. Even Cognat was not taken into his confidence. On the evening before Cognat's own consecration to the

subdiaconate, the two, he reports, had a long and serious conversation. Renan, indeed, advised his friend to pause before taking a step that was irrevocable, and which, with changing opinions, he might regret. But Cognat did not then suspect the real ground of this advice. "Nothing," he says, "in my relations with M. Renan had prepared me for it. In truth, he had never confided to me his doubts respecting the very foundations of Christianity." The time, however, was at hand when they were to be not only confided to Cognat, but to sever Renan's connection with St. Sulpice, to the great astonishment and sorrow of his teachers there, most worthy and amiable men, on whose excellent qualities of head and heart he bestowed afterwards the amplest recognition, and whose misfortune rather than fault, it was that their training and position had made them spiritually narrow-minded.

Hebrew, as the language of the Old Testament, formed part of the instruction given at St. Sulpice to its budding theologians. The principal of the establishment, a very aged as well as amiable ecclesiastic, and, like all his colleagues, rigidly orthodox, delivered lectures on Hebrew, while a much more erudite Semitic scholar, M. Le Hir, taught the class of Hebrew grammar. Renan, who says of himself that he was born a philologist as well as a priest, was one of the most eager and diligent of Le Hir's pupils. So promising a student was he that when in course of time the aged principal surrendered the Hebrew lectureship to Le Hir, he gave over the class of Hebrew grammar to Renan. To his great surprise he was offered by the authorities, when he entered on his

new and congenial duties, a salary of three hundred francs (£12). The unworldly young man thought the sum so extravagant that he declined the offer, and with difficulty was brought to accept a hundred and fifty francs (a modest £6) for the purchase of books.

Naturally he contracted an intimacy with Le Hir, like himself a Breton, under whom he prosecuted his higher Hebrew studies, and who taught him Arabic and Syriac. It so happened that Le Hir had familiarised himself with modern German exegesis, so much of which was heterodox. But while it enriched his knowledge it never influenced his orthodoxy. What Le Hir found in German exegesis compatible with Catholic orthodoxy he appropriated; what he found incompatible he rejected utterly, not without indignant protests. It was only natural that such a pupil of such a teacher should be curious to know at first hand something of German exegesis, samples of which doubtless abounded in the ample library which Le Hir amiably placed at Renan's disposal. But for a knowledge of the kind that of German was indispensable. Renan set to work to learn it, and with the aid of a fellow-seminarist from Alsace he mastered it. In his intense curiosity to know what had been discovered in Germany respecting the Bible he grappled first of all with German exegetics. Strauss's famous *Leben Jesu*, it may be noted, had been published some ten years before. The results of his new studies were to Renan a revelation. Here is his own account of it, given retrospectively in the *Souvenirs*:—

"Literature was so secondary a matter, in the midst of the burning inquiry which absorbed me, that at first I paid little

attention to it"—that is, to German non-theological literature. "Nevertheless I was sensible," in that literature, "of the presence of a new kind of genius, very different from that of our seventeenth century. I admired it all the more that I could see no bounds to it. I was struck by the peculiar intellectualism of Germany at the end of the last century and during the first half of this. I thought myself entering a temple. There indeed was what I was seeking for, the reconciliation of a highly religious with the critical spirit. Now and then for a moment I regretted that I was not a Protestant, so that I could be a philosopher without ceasing to be a Christian. . . .

"In point of fact, everything is true in a book which is divine in its origin. In such a book there must be no contradictions, since two contradictions cannot at one and the same time be both of them true. Now the attentive study which I gave to the Bible," read in the light thrown on it by German exegesis, "while it revealed to me historical and æsthetic treasures, also proved to me that it was no more than any other ancient book free from contradictions, inadvertences, mistakes. There are to be found in it fables, legends, traces of a wholly human authorship. It is no longer possible to maintain that the second part of Isaiah is by Isaiah. The book of Daniel, which all who are orthodox attribute to the time of the captivity, is an apocryphal work composed in the year 169 or 170 before Jesus Christ. The book of Judith is an historical impossibility. The ascription of the Pentateuch to Moses cannot be maintained, and to deny that several portions of Genesis have a mythical character is to be compelled to treat as narratives of events which actually happened, the accounts, for instance, of the terrestrial paradise, of the forbidden fruit, of Noah's ark. But you cannot be a Catholic if on a single one of these points you depart from the traditional statement. What becomes of the miracle so very much admired by Bossuet, Cyrus named two hundred years before his birth? What becomes of the fifty weeks of years on which are based the calculations of Bossuet's *Histoire Universelle*, if the portion of the book of Isaiah in which Cyrus is named was actually written in the time of that conqueror, and if the pseudo-Daniel was a contemporary of Antiochus Epiphanes? According to orthodoxy,

it is obligatory to believe that the books of the Bible are the handiwork of those to whom the titles attribute them. The mildest Catholic teaching respecting inspiration forbids the admission that the sacred text contains any pronounced error, or any contradiction even in matters which concern neither faith nor morals."

The crisis was near at hand in the autumn of 1845, six months after he wrote to a young friend at Tréguier the letter from which an extract has been given (*ante*, p. 34). Renan spent his holidays, as usual, at Tréguier with his much-loved mother, who began sorrowfully to suspect, without understanding, what was passing in his mind. He had so distanced spiritually his old teachers, the good priests of Tréguier, that he found it difficult to converse with them, and they, too, had glimpses of the change which had come over him. He was far removed from the influences of St. Sulpice, and from his spiritual director there, who, to his avowal of doubt, had replied much in the same way as that of the principal of the Issy seminary, "Temptations against the faith! Pay no attention to them! go straight on!" advising him by way of cure to take those sub-deacon's orders from which it has been seen Renan recoiled.

The extracts which have just been given from the *Souvenirs* are interesting in themselves, and as a calm retrospect forty years later of those two years of inward struggle, a period which he called at the time one of devotion to the study of Hebrew and the Old Testament. But far more valuable to those interested in Renan's character and career are the letters which he wrote while his in-

ternal struggle was proceeding and was ending. They are diffuse and sometimes a little rambling, but they mirror with perfect accuracy the varying emotions produced in Renan by that conflict between Faith and Doubt which in modern times has raged in many a mind, but which one knows not to have been anywhere else than in Renan's letters of 1845-46 recorded with such fidelity and transparent clearness. Several men and women of letters in our own country have made the conflict the theme of works of fiction, or of prominent episodes in them. But whatever may have been the ability, the knowledge of the questions at issue, as well as of human nature, shown in their delineations, they must yield in interest to the transcript from stern and painful reality given in Renan's correspondence. This is not a novel-hero made to think and speak for the amusement or the excitement of miscellaneous readers. Renan's letters are not products of literary art, the skilfully contrived effusions of an imaginary character, the figments of a novelist's brain, but the genuine utterances, given in the strictest confidence, and not in the slightest degree meant for publication, of a living man in travail and in sore trouble, beset by the direst perplexities, internal and external.

By those who have followed thus far Renan's biography, the extract about to be given from one of his letters will need no elucidation unless in the case of the tutorship in Germany. This connects itself with the story of his sister, of whom nothing has been said in these pages since they chronicled the old life at Tréguier, and to whom Renan makes but few and scanty references

in the *Souvenirs*, though in the preface to it, and while palliating this reticence in regard to her, he speaks of her as the "person who has had the greatest influence on my life." On leaving Tréguier she became a teacher and then a school-mistress in Paris, but finding her position distasteful she accepted a situation as governess in a family in Poland. She paid, with her pupil, frequent visits to Germany, and acquired a strong taste for German philosophical speculation. The result was a deep sympathy with her brother's efforts to shake himself free from the shackles of Catholicism. In her letters she warmly encouraged him to be done with Christian dogma, so that in the step which he was contemplating he had the earnest approval of his dear and cultivated sister to counterbalance, in some degree at least, the regretful anticipations of their simple-minded mother. As at once a provision for him, if he decided on abandoning an ecclesiastical career, and to give him a domicile in the country to the literature and philosophy of which he owed so much, she procured him the offer of the tutorship in Germany incidentally referred to in the following letter. The offer, it will be seen, was not ultimately accepted. It was during his sojourn at Tréguier in the autumn of 1845—his last sojourn there for many a long year—when the thought of entering the Roman Catholic priesthood had become intolerable to him, that for the first time he confided his doubts to his friend Cognat, who was startled and saddened by the unexpected disclosure.

"My dear Friend,—Few events of importance have occurred, but many reflections and emotions have been crowding in upon me since we parted. I yield to the need which I feel of imparting them

to you all the more willingly that there is no one here to whom I can confide them. Doubtless, with my mother by my side, I am not alone, but how many things there are on which my affection for her bids me be silent, and which, after all, she would not be able to understand.

"There has been no fact of importance to advance the solution of the great problem which so justly absorbs me. I have learned nothing new, unless it be the enormity of the sacrifice which heaven was about to exact from me. A thousand vexations which I did not anticipate have complicated my situation and made me feel that the course which my conscience dictated was opening before me an abyss of suffering. To make you understand them I should have to enter into long and painful details; suffice it to tell you that the obstacles about which we have sometimes talked are nothing compared to those which have suddenly started up before me. To make light of a verdict on me which will be a very severe one, to pass through long years of painful life to arrive at a doubtful goal, was already much, but it was not to be enough. God further commands me to pierce with my own hand a heart on which all the affection of my own has been poured out. In me filial love had absorbed all the other affections of which I was capable, and which God has not called on me to feel. Besides, there were between my mother and myself quite special ties connected with a thousand delicate things which can be only felt, not expressed. Well! there it is that God has fixed the most painful of my sacrifices. Germany is all that hitherto I have spoken of to her, and that has been enough to distress her deeply. *O mon dieu*, what will happen when—— Her caresses make me unhappy, her fine dreams of her son a priest, of which she is always speaking to me, and which I have not the courage to contradict, make me feel broken-hearted. There she is, quite close to me, while I am writing you these lines. Ah! if she knew! I would sacrifice everything to her except my duty and my conscience. Yes, if to spare her this pain, God asked me to extinguish my thinking-power, to condemn myself to a simple and vulgar life, I would consent. But is it in the power of man to believe or not to believe? I wish that I had the power to stifle the faculty which compels investigation: that is the faculty which has made me miser-

able. Happy the children in spirit who all their lives do nothing but sleep and dream! Around me I see pious and simple-minded men, to make whom virtuous and happy Christianity has sufficed, but I have observed that not one of them possesses the critical faculty; let them thank God for that.

"Here I am made much of and caressed more than I can tell you. Ah! if they knew what is pressing in my heart. Sometimes I tremble at the sight of a kind of hypocrisy in my behaviour, but I have seriously argued the matter out with my conscience. God preserve me from scandalising these simple people!

"When I consider in what an inextricable net God has enmeshed me, then I am visited by the thought of fatalism, and often as I may thus have sinned I never doubted my Father who is in heaven, nor his goodness. On the contrary, I have always thanked Him, and was never nearer Him than in those very moments. The heart learns only by suffering, and I think, like Kant, that God is only learned through the heart. At that time, too, I was a Christian, and I have sworn always to be one. But is Catholic orthodoxy critical? Ah! if I had been born in Germany, and a Protestant. That would have been the proper place for me. Herder was really a bishop-superintendent of the Lutheran consistory at Weimar,—assuredly he was just a Christian; but in Catholicism one must be orthodox. It is inflexible, and not to be reasoned with. . . .

"I continue to have the courage to go forward with my thinking. Nothing will make me abandon this occupation, even though I were forced to appear to sacrifice to it the acquisition of my daily bread. To support me at this critical moment God kept in reserve for me a genuine event of importance, intellectually and morally. I have studied Germany, and studying it I felt myself entering a temple. Whatever I have found there is pure, elevated, moral, beautiful, and affecting. Yes, O my soul, German thought is a treasure, the continuation of Jesus Christ. The morality of the German thinkers enchants me. How strong they are and how mild! I believe that it is thence the new Christ will come to us. I regard this apparition of a new spirit to be a fact analogous to the birth of Christianity in all but the difference of form. But this difference matters little, for it is certain that when the fact which is to renovate

the world returns, it will not in the manner of its accomplishment resemble that which has already taken place. . . .

"Yes, that Germany gives me transports of delight, less in its scientific achievements than in its ethical spirit. The ethics of Kant are far superior to his logic and metaphysics; and yet we French have not had a word to say about them. That is easily understood; the men of to-day are without a moral sense. France seems to me more and more pledged to do-nothingism in the great work which is to renovate the life of humanity." . . . In France, "Jesus Christ is nowhere to be found. I have been tempted to think that he would come to us from Germany, not that I imagine that his coming will be that of an individual, it will be that of his spirit, and when we say 'Jesus Christ' we mean of course to denote less an individual than a spirit of a certain kind, that of the Gospel. Nor do I mean that this apparition will involve either a reversal or a discovery; but Jesus Christ neither reversed nor discovered. One must be a Christian, but one must not be orthodox. What we must have is a pure, an unadulterated Christianity."

Such a passage calls to mind the hopes which, some fifteen years before Renan wrote thus, Carlyle, after quitting Presbyterian orthodoxy and the Scotch kirk, had based on the higher literature of Germany, as "the beginning of a new revelation of the God-like."

And time pressed. Renan would soon have to return to St. Sulpice and make up his mind to do one thing or the other. "It is with unspeakable terror," he wrote to Cognat, "that I see the approach of the end of the holidays, an epoch when I must translate into most decisive action the most indeterminate of internal states of mind. It is this complication of external and internal that makes the whole cruelty of my position." If he gave up a clerical career, what was he to do? For practical life he felt unfitted. Long afterwards, when he had rubbed

shoulders with the world for many years, a friend told him, and he admits told him truly, that he thought like a man, felt like a woman, and acted like a child. It is a characteristic illustration of the spiritual sensitiveness of this child in the ways of the world, that he is found, in the same letter to Cognat, expressing his dread lest, even if he were successful in practical life, contact with his associates might destroy, he said, "the purity of my heart and my conception of life," as he thought it ought to be led. "And even," he added, "if I were sure of myself, can I be sure of the environment which acts so fatally on all of us?" He was almost tempted to complain of the Deity for having placed "a poor child" in his then predicament. "It matters not," he continued, "I love him, and am persuaded that all he has done is for my good, in spite of the contradiction of facts. . . . Courage lies in this—no one but myself can make me do evil." A true and brave thought, which served him in good stead at this great crisis of his probation, and afterwards.

A fortnight later than the letter to Cognat describing the conflict which was raging within him, he addressed another to his spiritual director at St. Sulpice. It was merely a calmer and more formal restatement of what he had said to Cognat, and therefore need not be quoted. The duties of the tutorship in Germany could not be entered on until the following spring, and he was unwilling to pass at St. Sulpice the months that must intervene until spring came. The scheme which he favoured was to spend in Paris a year of studious freedom, the conditions of which he left undefined, and during which he could come to some definite conclusion as

well as take his university degrees. On arriving at St. Sulpice at the beginning of October (1845), he was forced to act precipitately on the decision which he had already formed. He was told that he had ceased to belong to St. Sulpice, and had been appointed to a Carmelite establishment which had just been founded by the Archbishop of Paris. Of course this appointment had to be refused, and reticence was now impossible. All was told. After the letter to his Director the authorities of St. Sulpice were not astonished at Renan's defection from the faith, and Le Hir kindly gave him good advice as to his future studies. Renan had an interview with his former principal of the St. Nicolas seminary, the Abbé Dupanloup, and appears to have confided to him more fully than to any one else his doubts as to the truth of Christianity. The Abbé knew nothing of German exegesis, but after having heard all, he told Renan plainly that his was a total loss of faith, that he had ceased to belong to the Church, and that he ought not for a single day longer to pass himself off as a cleric. To the Abbé Dupanloup's honour, be it added, that otherwise he behaved to Renan with fatherly kindness. When Renan was working at his *Souvenirs*, he had before him a little note which the Abbé wrote to him just as he was leaving St. Sulpice for ever. "Are you in want of money?" it ran; "in your situation that would be very natural. My poor purse is at your disposal. I wish that I could offer you something much more valuable. My offer, one very natural, will not, I hope, hurt your feelings." Renan declined the offer with thanks, for his good sister, to aid him in taking the step which his con-

science dictated, and which she approved, had sent him out of her little savings 1200 francs (nearly £50).[1] One of the Directors of St. Sulpice, who, unlike the Abbé Dupanloup, did not think Renan irrevocably lost to the Church, recommended him to a situation in a preparatory school annexed to the Collège Stanislas. It suited him in every respect but one, but that one constituted a vital objection. He had to make externally an open profession of clericalism. After a brief trial, for conscience' sake he threw up the appointment, though not without regret, and abandoned the clerical garb for ever.

As a critic of the history of Judaism and Christianity Renan was destined to be the French successor of Voltaire. But, as often happens, even with royalty, the procedure of the successor was very different from that of him whom he succeeded. Much of this result was due to the different idiosyncrasies of the two men, but much also to the difference in the influences brought to bear on them in early life, and to the fact that Voltaire lived before the first French Revolution, while Renan arrived at manhood after a third one. Voltaire was by nature

[1] Renan himself says little or nothing of any spiritual influence exerted on him at this time by his sister; but in this connection, Mrs. Crawford, of Paris, gives, in an interesting article on Renan (*Fortnightly Review* for November 1892), some details, apparently furnished by the Abbé Icard, the only one of Renan's St. Sulpice teachers then alive, and a nonagenarian. Renan at St. Sulpice is said to have "received letters from his sister, and books of German philosophy that she smuggled in to him. The Abbé Icard, who never saw her, deems her to have been a tool of Satan. She had plunged into the philosophical movement of Germany, a country she often went to stay in with her pupils."

sceptical, ambitious, pushing, thirsting for literary fame, fond of the good things of this world, and bent on gaining a fair share of them. Renan was by nature believing, docile, modest, disinterested, and his most powerful aspiration was to prove all things and hold fast that which is true, without any hankering after worldly success or fear of worldly failure. Voltaire received his early education from the Jesuits, and always spoke gratefully of them, and appreciatively of their worth as men and as teachers. But he was a scoffer when he went to the Collège Louis le Grand, and he remained a scoffer when he left it. He seems never to have been visited by any spiritual emotion derived from the Christian religion, and in early manhood he was thrown, indeed he cheerfully threw himself, into the dissolute and incredulous society of the Regency, and of the age of Louis XV. His first pleadings for the free expression of thought, in the sphere not merely of theology but of philosophy and science, were treated as crimes, and he who might have been merely a *frondeur* was exasperated into a rebel. It was the bigotry of the orthodox that obstructed his meritorious attempts to diffuse a knowledge of the now universally accepted discoveries of Newton, and that threatened him with the direst penalties for even a temperate promulgation of the truths of Natural Religion. What wonder if he turned on his persecutors, and, when purchasing for himself a kind of uneasy exile in Switzerland, proclaimed without reserve his disbelief in their dogmas, denied the authority of the books on which these were founded, and resolutely, if unfortunately, shut his eyes to the good

that had been worked in the world when orthodoxy swayed the best intellects and hearts, as well as the ignorant and superstitious masses? It is not when your enemy attacks you, when he has his hands upon your throat, and is bent on choking the life out of you, that you are likely to reflect on what may be his excellent qualities, or on the benefits which in former years he may have conferred on society! Renan, on the other hand, from childhood lived, moved, and had his being in the Christian religion. The services of the Roman Catholic Church, its public and private worship, devout meditation on the transcendent holiness and beautiful character of the Founder of Christianity, had been his joy and support. His ultimate rejection of the dogmas of the Romish Church did not alter his view of that character, or impair his knowledge of the good done by Christianity in the past and the present. He could reverence Christianity without believing in its supernatural origin, just as in a lower degree he reverenced Buddha without believing in the legends which had grown around his birth and biography. Voltaire's character and circumstances unfitted him to form a right estimate of Christianity and its saints and martyrs; while for the formation of such an estimate Renan was excellently fitted by his character and circumstances. Where Voltaire had overturned, Renan reconstructed, and gave the new structure a shape that commended itself to very many rational and thinking men. And if Renan's rejection of the dogmas of orthodoxy procured him a host of enemies, he was far more fortunate in his age than Voltaire had been in his. Even under the Second Empire Renan could speak his

mind freely in books and periodicals, if not officially in the lecture-room. The worst that the bigots could do to him was to bombard him with virulent pamphlets, and these never disturbed his peace of mind, or in the least fettered his freedom, personal and intellectual. In regard to the expression of opinion, three French revolutions made the absolutism of Napoleon III. a very different one from that of Louis XV. Renan reaped fame and profit by saying, without let or hindrance, what Voltaire, even in his mildest and least aggressive moods, could say only by bringing into play the machinery of secret printing-presses and surreptitious distribution, while running the risk of having his works confiscated and burned by the public executioner in his own country, and of seeing those who promoted their circulation subjected to the severest pains and penalties which French bigotry could inflict.

Renan's training in exclusively ecclesiastical seminaries not only enabled but induced him to do justice to the Roman Catholic priesthood. From early boyhood to early manhood he was constantly associated with priests, and never once, he says, did he find scandal associated with any of them. From the humble priests of Tréguier to his highly cultivated teachers at St. Nicolas, at Issy, and at St. Sulpice, all were the best of men, and at St. Sulpice, in particular, "there was virtue enough," he declared, "to govern the world," if such a world as ours could be governed by virtue. From first to last an austere morality, based on religion, was strenuously inculcated on Renan by all his teachers, and when he gave up religion, at least religion as taught by them, the

morality continued to abide with him like a second nature.

"St. Sulpice," he says, "had left on me so powerful an impression that for years I remained a Sulpician as regards not belief but morals. That excellent education had given my docile nature an indestructible tendency. Faith disappearing, morality remains. My programme for long was to surrender as little as possible of Christianity, and to preserve all of it that can be practised without faith in the supernatural. I sorted out in some fashion the virtues of the Sulpician, discarding those which connect themselves with a positive belief, and retaining those which a philosopher can approve.'

The training which Renan had received was not only fruitful for the world, but invaluable to himself, suddenly emancipated as he was from all control, and left to his own devices in such a city as Paris.

CHAPTER III.

[1845-52.]

WITH the opening of November 1845, and having shaken from off his feet the dust of orthodoxy, Renan accepted the modest position of tutor in a boarding-house of the Quartier Latin, in which were domiciled pupils of the neighbouring Lycée, called after Henry IV. He was boarded and lodged *gratis*, but received no salary. "I had," he says, "a little room, and took my meals with the pupils. My duties occupied me for scarcely two hours out of the twenty-four, and I had therefore a great deal of time for work. I was completely satisfied." Not a whisper of complaint at this meagre and forlorn-looking existence! In one of his last letters to Cognat, his intimacy with whom was soon to be dissolved by his altered views, he speaks of fits of melancholy, springing not from his poverty but from his spiritual and personal isolation, and from the grief of his mother at his abandonment of a clerical career. But happier moods intervened. "Since my sacrifice was completed," he wrote, "and in the thick of troubles which were greater than would be readily believed, and which perhaps a false delicacy forces me to conceal from every one, I have

tasted an inward peace unknown at epochs of my life apparently more serene." In the course of a year he began to wonder that he could ever have believed what he had believed. He consoled by little artifices his dear mother, who fancied his position even more difficult than it was, and that he must be suffering intolerable hardships. By degrees he convinced her, moreover, that he was as good and affectionate a son as ever, and the wound in her heart was healed. Then there was always the loving sympathy of his kind sister to cheer and encourage him, and last, not least, the enjoyment of a pure and true friendship was vouchsafed him in that rather dreary domicile in which he spent, he says, three years and a half. His new friend was Marcellin Berthelot, seven years Renan's junior, who was studying at the Lycée Henri IV., and has since risen to eminence as a chemist and a public man. Young Berthelot was devoted to science without any ulterior object, a disinterestedness very congenial to Renan, and the closest intimacy sprang up between junior and senior. Each was interested in his friend's pursuits. Berthelot taught Renan chemistry among other things, and Renan tried to teach him Hebrew, but devotion to the laboratory impeded his progress. Berthelot's father was a Gallican Christian of the old school, but the son's slender remains of orthodox faith vanished in the course of a little commune with Renan. "After the first months of 1846," he says, "the clear scientific view of a universe in which no volition superior to that of man acts in any appreciable fashion became the immovable anchor from which we never wandered." His sister's love and Berthelot's

friendship were sunshine on the path of the struggling and brave young Renan.

Apart from these sources of happiness, work, steady and manifold, was Renan's chief, nay, only enjoyment. He had to study for his academic degrees, to improve his knowledge of languages, especially the Semitic, and to read far and wide in pursuance of what he already regarded as the one great object of his life—that of making clear to himself, and possibly to others, the origin and development, irrespectively of any supernatural revelation or intervention, of the Jewish and Christian religions. Christianity had sprung out of Judaism, and Hebrew being the language in which mainly the Old Testament was written, that and the cognate Semitic forms of speech had naturally an irresistible attraction for the young inquirer. From another point of view Renan saw in the history of languages the history of the mind of man, and that, therefore, philology, especially comparative philology, might be of the highest philosophical importance. Bopp's Comparative Grammar of the Indo-Germanic Languages probably suggested to him the execution of a work on the comparative history as well as grammar of the Semitic languages which he had been studying ardently at St. Sulpice, and after he left it, under excellent professors. His first laurels were won in the field familiar to him, and in the following way:—Volney, though best remembered by his Ruins of Empires, was also a zealous philologist. He aimed at originality, and among his philological schemes was one ingenious but impracticable, the establishment of a universal alphabet for all languages, Eastern and Western. He bequeathed to

the French Institute a yearly prize of 1200 francs (£48) to be given to the author of the best essay on his favourite linguistic problem. It was found that the competitors were few, and their productions unsatisfactory, so the subject of the prize was altered to one for the best philological essay, especially in the department of comparative grammar. Renan competed for the prize to be given in 1847, and he won it. I do not know that his prize essay was ever published, but it was the germ of his great work on the history of the Semitic languages, of which more hereafter.[1] The ability displayed in the prize essay led to a friendship with, and opened to Renan the lectures of, Eugène Burnouf, the Professor of Sanscrit at the Collège de France, and one of the greatest of modern Orientalists. Burnouf initiated Renan into a knowledge of the older Indian literatures, religions, and mythologies. With the chief Semitic languages, Hebrew, Arabic, and Syriac, and much of what had been written on them, Renan was already familiar. Burnouf's lectures opened up to him a new world of thought and imagination. At this point, it may be mentioned, the *Souvenirs* close, and the rather fitful light which they throw on Renan's career is henceforth wanting.

The events of the Revolutionary year, 1848, made of course a great impression on the susceptive Renan, and led him to take a deep interest in the political and social movements to which the rise of a second French

[1] Max Müller and Bopp were in subsequent years among the distinguished philologists who competed for, and won, the Volney prize.

republic gave a sudden impulse. The year was a busy one for him. During much of it he was occupied with an essay on a subject proposed for competition by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, into whose transactions, so often utilised by Gibbon in his great work, had been poured, as into a reservoir, the results of the erudite research of successive generations of French scholars. The subject was "The history of the study of the Greek language in the West of Europe from the end of the fifth to that of the fifteenth century." This finished, he had to prepare for the "aggregate competition" in philosophy in the autumn. He won the prize for the essay, and came out first in the "philosophy" examination, two feathers more in the young man's cap!

1848 was also the year of the first of Renan's many contributions to the periodical literature of his country. Some of them are of considerably more mark than is usual with the initial efforts of young authors. The most noticeable are contained in an interesting periodical, *La Liberté de Penser* (Freedom of Thought), which was founded in 1848 somewhat on the lines of the then long-established *Revue des Deux Mondes*, but paying more attention to philosophy and theology. As in the case of his fellow-contributors, among whom was Jules Simon, Renan's articles were signed. His first contribution was "The Origin of Languages," which was reprinted separately at the time, and, considerably expanded, re-appeared in volume-form in 1857. According to the theory defended in the essay, and developed in the volume with additional wealth of illustration,

language was neither a supernatural gift from the Creator nor gradually developed, but came into being, grammar as well as roots, simultaneously with man. As we know nothing of the first man or men, the theory can neither be proved nor disproved, and it is not supported by what we do know, or can surmise, of early man.

The Revolution of February 1848 was followed by the frightful and sanguinary insurrection of the June of the same year. Great was the ferment which the chaotic state of France, political, social, and intellectual, produced in Renan's at once ardent and contemplative mind. The result was that he spent the last months of 1848 and the first of 1849 in composing a book, into which he threw all the notions on the philosophy of life, and on the past, present and future of society, which much meditation, enriched by already vast reading, had yielded him. In July 1849 he contributed to *La Liberté de Penser* an article on the "Intellectual Activity of France in 1849," the editor of the periodical intimating in a note that the article was part of a volume, *L'Avenir de la Science* (The Future of Science), which was to appear in a few days. But the book thus promised was not published until 1890, forty years after the announcement; the reason for the long delay will be explained hereafter. The *Avenir de la Science* remained in 1890 to all intents and purposes the same work as when it came from its author's pen so long before. It teems with reflections and suggestions on almost every subject of human interest, with illustrations furnished by almost all the literatures of almost all ages. It was an extraordinary work, especially to have come from a young

man of five-and-twenty. Its philosophy was already that which he inculcated during most of the remainder of his life, and will often have to be reproduced in these pages, but some references must be made to it at the stage now reached of Renan's mental development. Society, he proclaimed, in opposition to the socialists, was not to be reformed by attempts to correct the unequal distribution of wealth, but by the universal diffusion of intellectual and moral culture. Man was not made for earthly enjoyment. Let us bring about a state of things in which wealth must appear insignificant and secondary, and culture, becoming a religion, will satisfy all the legitimate wants of humanity. But if all are to be philosophers, who is to do the daily work of the world? Let manual labour be adjoined to philosophy and intellectual culture. Spinoza polished spectacle glasses; a still more singular illustration to have suggested itself to a young French scholar, "Robert Burns, while following the plough, sang in the furrows, like a lark." The world was to be reformed by science; that is, by knowledge in the widest acceptation of the word. The old religions had vanished, but the new religion of science had more to give than the most venerable beliefs. "In my childhood and first youth I tasted the sweetest joys of the believer, but, and I say it from the bottom of my soul, such joys were nothing to those which I have felt in the pure contemplation of the beautiful and the passionate search after truth." This was the new heaven and the new earth announced by the young enthusiast in his garret. Already he was flinging out one of those audacious phrases which, viewing the cosmos and its soul as not

actually being but merely becoming, he was often to use in later life. "The universal work of all that lives is to make God perfect." This to ordinary mind unimaginable enterprise was to be effected by Reason, and Reason, in Renan's view, was first ascending her throne with the Revolution of 1848. Alas, for the young man's fond expectations! With 1851 came the presidency of Louis Napoleon, and with 1852 the Second Empire.

But for a biographer of Renan the most important of his contributions of 1848-49 to *La Liberté de Penser* was his article on "The Critical Historians of Jesus" ("Les Historiens critiques de Jésus," reprinted in *Études d'Histoire Religieuse*, 1857). Here he is seen already preparing himself for his own *Vie de Jésus*. He pronounces Strauss's book to be at bottom an attempt to apply to the Gospel narratives the philosophy of Hegel, of which Renan gives in a page or two, so far at least as is needed for his purpose, an admirably luminous account. Strauss's theory was that most of the incidents recorded in the Gospels are mythical, mere crystallisations of floating notions in the Jewish mind of what the Messiah, looked for before the birth of Jesus, was expected to be and to do. Renan, on the other hand, maintains that such a theory is not justified by the state of the Jewish mind at the birth of Christ, and he discriminates with great acuteness between the circumstances in which mythical theories are permissibly applicable and those in which they are not. In many cases he would prefer to "myth," a product of pure imagination, the term "legend," denoting a nucleus of truth round which fabulous matter has accreted.

To sum up:—

"Strauss shows himself a rather unphilosophical historian when he neglects to explain how Jesus came to be regarded by those among whom he lived as an adequate realisation of the Messianic ideal. . . . There is one fact which can only have been the effect of a powerful individuality—namely, the appearance of the new doctrine, the impulse which it gave, the spirit of sacrifice and devotedness which it succeeded in inspiring."

Then follows the decidedly interesting passage in which the method of Renan's own *Vie de Jésus* was adumbrated:—

"It may be affirmed that if the composition of the life of Christ, written in a scientific manner, had been undertaken by France, better endowed than Germany with the feeling of practical life and less inclined to substitute, in history, ideas for the action of the passions and of individualised characters, she would have displayed a method of greater precision, and in avoiding to transfer the problem, as Strauss has done, into the domain of abstract speculation, she would have made a much nearer approach to the truth."

Some of these articles attracted so much attention that from time to time in 1849 they were republished separately. The same year distinction was conferred on an essay, which displayed minute and curious erudition, contributed to the semi-official *Journal de l'Instruction Publique*, elucidating by means of the Semitic languages some points in the pronunciation of Greek. With the prizes which he had won, and his striking literary work, Renan was quite a notable young man only four years after he had crept, sorrowful and solitary, into that little room in the Quartier Latin. He was offered a chair in some provincial college, but he declined exile from Paris.

For a few months of 1849 he acted as substitute for a friend who was professor of philosophy at the Lycée of Versailles. It is significant of Renan's caution as an oral instructor of youth at this stage of his career that his friend having begun a course of lectures on the being and attributes of God, and leaving Renan to continue them, he avoided treatment of this thorny subject, especially as the Lycée was a government institution, and gave instead a course of lectures on æsthetics, having a deep feeling for art in all its chief departments. Renan was rising in the estimation of "men of light and leading." Among those whom his abilities, scholarship, and industry had made his friends, was the erudite Victor Le Clerc, with whom Renan afterwards collaborated in the massive work, *Histoire Littéraire de la France au xiv^e^ siècle*, begun by the Benedictines. The friendship of Le Clerc, and his own reputation, contributed to obtain for him a new and public honour. Among the admirable aids to struggling and meritorious scholarship provided by French institutions was the system of Missions of literary and scientific exploration at home and abroad, the members of which were appointed by the Ministry of Public Instruction, a system zealously developed when the ministers were such men as Guizot, Villemain, and Cousin, and continued by their successors. Towards the close of 1849, on the recommendation of Victor Le Clerc, the Académie des Inscriptions drawing up the needful instructions, Renan was appointed one of a commission of two ordered on a roving tour of exploration among the libraries, public and monastic, of Italy. His chief duty was to report on curious unedited

Syriac and Arabic manuscripts which he might come across, but he was also to keep his eyes open to any *trouvaille* of literary or historic interest which might be utilised for the *Histoire Littéraire de la France*. Not only among dusty manuscripts, but enjoying the new world of art opened up to him, he spent much of 1850 in Italy, and subsequently some months in England, to which apparently his mission was extended. In his report to the Minister of Public Instruction he declared that his Oriental "finds" in the manuscript department of the British Museum far exceeded all those which he had lighted on in Italy. In all probability it was the skill which these reports displayed him to possess in the manipulation and knowledge of Oriental manuscripts, that led to his appointment (in 1851) to a post in the department of Oriental MSS. in the Bibliothèque Nationale, no longer, of course, du Roi.

A private as well as a public object guided Renan in these assiduous and multifarious explorations. For his degree of Doctor of Letters (the "Doctorat ès Lettres"), which would complete his academic status, he had to compose two theses, one in Latin, the other in French. The materials for both were diligently accumulated during his foreign mission, and both were published in 1852 with his acquisition of the Doctor's degree. That in Latin was quite a small volume, though full of smelted Oriental learning, *De philosophiâ peripateticâ apud Syros commentatio historica*, in which was abundantly proved a favourite theory of Renan's that the knowledge of Aristotle, and indeed of anything else Hellenic, possessed by the mediæval Arabs, was wholly derived from

Syriac translations. The other and French thesis, the far more elaborate work which first gave Renan a place among the most erudite of European scholars, was *Averroës et l'Averroïsme.* Renan was attracted to this twelfth-century sage of Mohammedan Spain (Dante gave him a few words of appreciation in the *Inferno*) as a philosopher who, to a partial reproduction of Aristotle and his commentators, based on Arabic versions of Syriac translations from the Greek, added doctrines of his own and founded a school of advanced thought, which for several centuries exerted a great influence on European speculation. Strange phenomena and phases of thought had always an attraction for Renan, whose intellectual inquisitiveness was unbounded, and his volume is full of curious information respecting the philosophical and other sects of mediæval Mohammedanism and the interaction of Averroism and scholasticism. The range of erudition and the knowledge of the history of mediæval philosophy in Europe displayed by Renan are enormous, and he treats the abstrusest questions with an ease and animation which make the book instructive and interesting to students of the arcana of thought, and, it must be admitted, to them alone.

With his return from his continental mission Renan's good sister appears to have made up her mind to devote herself entirely to her brother. They set up house together in Paris in a little domicile at the bottom of a garden. Many years afterwards, when Renan's merits and fame procured him admission to the French Academy, the colleague, who, as usual on these occasions, addressed him an elaborate welcome, reminded him of their

acquaintance in those early days. "I see you again," he said, "in a little garden-house of the Rue du Val de Grace, where the maternal care of a sister, capable of all devotedness, had procured for you a shelter at a decisive hour of your youth. You passed a part of your days in the Bibliothèque Nationale. The whole evening was consecrated to work. Far on into the night the light of your lamp told the passers-by of the persistence of your laborious vigils. A skilful and intrepid tenderness satisfied all your needs, without requiring from you any exertion that could distract your studies, and spared you even the care of material things." Of what still more striking self-sacrifice Henriette Renan was capable will be seen a little further on. Nor was her usefulness to him confined to household affairs. She was a Mary and a Martha in one. She seems to have revised what he wrote, and to have exerted a wholesome influence on his mode of composition. She advised him to cultivate simplicity of style and to check that love of irony to which he was prone, and in which during his later years he indulged too often and too much.

The book on Averröes and Averroism was the first work of any kind from Renan's pen which was published by Michel Lévy, who became one of the foremost of French publishers, who until his death remained Renan's sole publisher, and who was followed in that function by his brothers and successors in business. Of his first connection with Michel Lévy, Renan gives in his *Souvenirs* an account which is interesting, but which would be more instructive if, with a provoking reticence or negligence not uncommon in his references to

himself, he had not omitted to give, even approximately, the date of the following incident. He was still in a garret, he says, when one fine day he received a visit from Lévy, who was a stranger to him. He had not until then fancied that he could make money by writing. To his great surprise Lévy offered to publish any of his future books, and to republish his contributions to periodicals. Renan might have looked coldly on the overture, but Lévy having brought with him a stamped agreement by which Renan constituted his visitor his sole publisher on certain terms, Renan consented. In course of time Lévy voluntarily offered to make his terms more favourable to Renan, who says that his publisher, he had reason to believe, did not lose by the bargain. Lévy can scarcely have lost by *Averroës et l'Averroïsme*, for, devoid as it was of anything like actuality, and in manner and matter "caviare to the general," it went in course of time to a third edition.

CHAPTER IV.

[1852-60.]

WHILE continuing to lay up among the Oriental manuscripts of the Bibliothèque new stores of Oriental and other lore for his great book on the Semitic languages, Renan became, in intervals of graver work, what the French call a publicist, and a distinguished one. According to his own account, having still on his hands the *Avenir de la Science*, only a slight fraction of which had been printed in *La Liberté de Penser*, he showed it to his friend Augustin Thierry, who strongly dissuaded him from publishing it. Silvestre de Sacy, son of the great Orientalist, and very influential in the councils of the *Journal des Débats*, tendered him the same advice. They further advised him to give from time to time in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the *Journal des Débats* such small doses of the work as could be swallowed by the French public, to whom the whole volume would be inevitably distasteful. Renan took their advice, the more cheerfully that the lapse of a few years had considerably chilled some of his hopes of 1848. He attached himself the more keenly to the great fortnightly and the great daily organ of moderate liberalism in

France, because just as he began to contribute to them came Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* of 2nd December 1851, and Renan was disgusted by the attitude on that day of the people of Paris, whom he saw enjoying rather than otherwise the blow dealt at public liberty.

Between the salary of his post in the Bibliothèque Nationale (so soon to become Impériale) and the income which he derived from literary work, Renan found himself in a position to marry. The lady of his choice was a niece of the famous painter, Ary Scheffer, and a daughter of his brother Henri, also an artist. Mademoiselle Scheffer was, perhaps fortunately, a Protestant. Renan's biographers assign 1856 as the date of the marriage. By more than one of them a touching story is told in connection with the event. For several years Renan's devoted sister Henriette had shared his domicile, sympathising with and aiding his studies, and making his home attractive;—Sainte-Beuve says that it was to her that he owed his first acquaintance with Renan, an acquaintance which ripened into intimacy. When her brother told her of his contemplated marriage, she showed so much grief at the thought of ceasing to have him all to herself, that he generously declared his intention to remain single for her sake. Mademoiselle Renan outvied her brother in generosity. She rushed to Mademoiselle Scheffer and begged her not to give up Renan. It was the sister who now did her utmost to bring about the union, the thought of which had at first pained her so much. The marriage took place and proved a very happy one; two children were born of it, a son and a daughter. Henriette Renan appears to have remained

in the home of her wedded brother, and was by his side until her death.

In 1855, the year before the date assigned to his marriage, appeared what was until then Renan's *opus maximum*, his "General History and Comparative System of the Semitic Languages" (*Histoire Générale et Système Comparé des Langues Sémitiques*), a very important expansion of the essay which had gained him the Volney prize. A second volume was to have done for the comparative grammar of the Semitic languages, dealt with in the first volume, what Bopp had done for the Indo-Germanic languages, but no second volume ever appeared. The volume which did appear received the honour of being crowned by the Institute, and excited the attention not only of scholars qualified to estimate the erudition displayed in it and to pronounce on the value of its conclusions, but of others. A knowledge of one of these conclusions was diffused among cultivated readers everywhere. Renan elaborated in the volume his favourite theory that the essential differences in race and language between Indo-Europeans (or, as they are now called, Aryans) and Semites were accompanied by a fundamental difference in their way of regarding the universe. The Semitic races were by nature monotheistic: the Indo-European were polytheistic. The latter from the first deified the powers of Nature; the former detached the Deity from the universe, and their characteristic formula is the first verse of Genesis—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The three great monotheistic religions, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Mohammedan were of

Semitic origin, and no member of the Indo-European family had ever embraced monotheism except through a member of the Semitic family. It was not by reflection but by following an instinct of head and heart that the Semites were monotheists. On the other hand, they had neither philosophy nor science, neither mythology nor epic poetry. The faculties which beget mythology also beget philosophy, and India and Greece produced the richest of mythologies side by side with the profoundest systems of philosophy. The poetry of the Semites was entirely subjective. They lacked creative imagination. The epic, a product of mythology, and the drama are unknown to them, and in fiction they get no further than the apologue. Monotheism made painting and the plastic arts repugnant to them. They have not founded great polities like the Greeks and Romans, or organised great empires like the Persians. Society with the Semite was an affair of the tent and the tribe. In short, their characteristics are chiefly negative. But their one great positive characteristic outweighs all their deficiencies. Mankind owes monotheism to the Semites, —a debt of incalculable value. The popular acceptance of this striking theory of Renan was accompanied, however, by statements from experts strenuously controverting it. The objections urged against it then have been strengthened by others which the progress of knowledge, especially of Assyriology, has suggested. Renan, while defending his theory in the main, slightly modified it, as will be seen hereafter.

His history of the Semitic languages procured Renan, at the early age of thirty-six, the honour of being elected

a member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres, in succession to Augustin Thierry, who, old and blind, had been assisted by Renan in his historical researches, and who introduced him to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*.

From 1851 to 1860, when there was a new departure in his career, Renan contributed more or less steadily to the *Journal des Débats* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and in both cases found himself in distinguished company. So select was the public addressed by the *Débats* that Silvestre de Sacy (son of the Orientalist), a fastidious as well as accomplished gentleman of the old school, told Renan to write as if he were only to have five hundred readers! The exclusiveness of the *Revue* was of a very different kind. Buloz, its founder, proprietor, and editor, was a hard-headed and hard-fisted man of business, not at all cultivated, but with a quick eye for what he thought would suit the readers of his periodical. "A deux cent lieues de cet imbécille de Buloz" (Two hundred leagues away from that fool of a Buloz) is the heading of one of the private letters of Alexandre Dumas *père!* The first paper which Renan presented to Buloz was an elaborate study on Buddha, Buddhism, and the Buddhists, themes the mastery of which he had begun under his much-prized teacher Eugène Burnouf. Buloz read the paper and rejected it, declaring it to be impossible that there could be such silly people as the Buddhists! The essay remained in Renan's desk until 1884, when he published it in his *Nouvelles Études d'Histoire Religieuse*, in the preface to which he told the story of its rejection. But this was a solitary rebuff.

Many of Renan's contributions to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and to the *Journal des Débats* were collected and republished in his "Studies of Religious History" (*Études d'Histoire Religieuse*, 1857), and some more of them in his "Ethical and Critical Essays" (*Essais de Morale et de Critique*, 1859).

These essays, both as they appeared and when collected, procured for Renan a very much larger circle of readers and admirers than his works on Averröes and the Semitic languages. The range of subjects was extraordinary, from the religions of antiquity, the primitive grammar of India, the history of the people of Israel, Mohammed and Mohammedanism, to Feuerbach and the neo-Hegelians, and the future of Metaphysics and of Religion; from the Lives of the Saints to Calvin and Channing; from the poetry of the Celtic races to the poetry of the Paris Exhibition of 1855, while interspersed were critico-biographical sketches of such men as Cousin, Augustin Thierry, and Lamennais. "He who brings much," says the theatre-manager in *Faust*, "brings something to every one," and the cultivated reader must be fastidious indeed who does not find something to interest him in these essays of Renan. His graceful and pellucid style had a flexibility that fitted it for the expression of all thought and all emotion. Renan had the faculty of making his subject, whether it were one for narrative or disquisition, perfectly clear to himself, and his wealth and felicity of expression rendered it delightfully clear to his readers. Religious themes are those which he treats most congenially, for with him religion in all its phases and developments was the truest expression of the

individual and the national mind. One of the most interesting of the essays is on the history of the people of Israel, and is based on Ewald's well-known work. Renan always maintained that the universe had become more and not less grand and beautiful with the passing away of the old mythologies,—the "fair humanities of old religion,"—and the substitution for them of rigid, scientific law. In the same spirit he begins his essay on the history of the people of Israel by throwing down the gauntlet to the orthodox, and declaring his conviction that in destroying the old accepted notions, as to both the inspiration of the Old Testament, and the authorship and dates of the books contained in it, modern criticism has enhanced, not diminished, their value: "Jerusalem has issued more brilliant and beautiful than before from the work, seemingly destructive, of modern science. The pious narratives with which our childhood was cradled have become, thanks to a sane interpretation of them, lofty truths, and it is we who see Israel in its real beauty, it is the critics who are justly entitled to say, *Stantes erant pedes nostri in atriis tuis, Jerusalem!*"[1]

The essay on Calvin is perhaps in those two volumes that which gives the best notion of Renan's conscientious attachment to truth in the formation of his judgments, and of his catholic appreciation of men against whom his own intellectual and ethical prepossessions would naturally prejudice him. No

[1] The Authorised Version makes a future of what in the Vulgate is a past tense. "Our feet *shall* stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem!" (Psalm cxxii. 2).

personal and theological characteristics could be more antagonistic to Renan than those of Calvin. Calvin was harsh, austere, vindictive, a relentless persecutor, the preacher of predestination, in fact, everything that Renan was not. Yet see how fair the French free-thinker of the nineteenth century is to the French fanatic of the sixteenth! After cataloguing Calvin's faults of character, and some of his tyrannical acts, Renan proceeds thus:—

"The inevitable result of the character and position of Calvin was intolerance. Whenever man allows himself to be dominated by an idea which he believes to be truth so complete, absolute, and evident that whoso does not embrace it is either blind or culpable, he is necessarily intolerant. At the first glance there is a strange inconsistency in Calvin's demand for liberty of thought and speech for himself and his, while refusing it to others. But in reality the matter is quite a simple one. He believed otherwise than the Catholics did, but he believed quite as firmly as they. What is very erroneously regarded as the essence of nascent Protestantism, freedom of belief, the right of the individual to construct for himself his own religious symbol, was scarcely thought of in the sixteenth century. No doubt the appeal of the Church to Scripture could not but ultimately bring profit to criticism, and in that sense the first reformers were veritably the ancestors of free-thought. But they were so without their knowledge and without their will. . . . And what was Calvin's tyranny at Geneva to the contemporary persecutions of his fellow-Protestants in France under Francis I., the voluptuary and sceptic who had not even Philip II.'s excuse, that of believing, but who from mere motives of secular policy sanctioned a sanguinary, and worse than sanguinary, persecution? Let us remember the state of excitement in which the fervent disciple of the Reformation must have lived when there came to him from Paris, from Lyons, from Chambéry, etc., news of the tortures endured by those of his religion. History has not sufficiently insisted on the atrocity of these persecutions, and on the resignation,

the courage, and the serenity of the sufferers. Pages are there worthy of the first ages of the Church, and I do not doubt that a simple and instructive narrative of those sublime struggles, compiled from the documents and correspondence of the period, would equal in beauty the ancient martyrology. During those times of trial and probation the voice of Calvin attains a fulness and a loftiness which are truly admirable. His letters to the martyrs of Lyons and of Chambéry, and to the female prisoners of the Châtelet, seem like an echo from the heroic periods of Christianity, like pages extracted from the writings of Tertullian or Cyprian."

In the Critical and Ethical Essays there are two, in close juxtaposition, which offer a contrast not only very striking but singularly characteristic of Renan. The one is on "The Poetry of the Exhibition" ("La Poésie de l'Exposition," that of Paris in 1855), the other on "The Poetry of the Celtic Races." This last is the only composition in which Renan deals with a theme which must have been very dear to him as a Breton, for Brittany was, and is, one of the chief homes of Celtic song, and of romantic as well as of monastic and other ecclesiastical legend. The most recent researches, indeed, tend to confirm the theory that the cycle of Arthurian legend was born in Brittany, and there King Arthur still lives in the minds and memories of the people, as is testified by an interesting anecdote of Renan's own telling. In 1887, thirty years after the period in his biography now arrived at, he delivered an address of welcome to the members of a Welsh Archæological Association, who, in the course of a trip to Brittany, paid him a visit there. "You come from Lannion," not very far from Tréguier, and a region famous as the scene of the mythical Arthur's exploits—"you come,"

he said to his guests, "from Lannion, my mother s native town. I shall now give you a reminiscence of that little town, which was told me by your great poet Tennyson. In the course of an excursion in Brittany he spent a night at Lannion. On leaving he asked his hostess for his bill. 'Oh! nothing, Monsieur,' was her answer. 'It was you who sang of our King Arthur!'" It shows how strongly ecclesiastical was Renan's bent in boyhood that while the earlier section of his *Souvenirs* teems with legends of Breton saints which impressed his youthful mind, he says nothing of King Arthur, of the many other secular legends of Brittany, or of its abundant popular songs. In his riper years, however, of severance from the Catholic Church he revelled in Lady Charlotte Guest's *Mabinogion*, in the stores of Celtic literature accumulated by Welsh scholars, and of Breton legends and songs collected by Villemarqué. In the essay on Celtic poetry, which perhaps suggested to Matthew Arnold, who calls it "beautiful," his volume *On the Study of Celtic Literature*, Renan dilates lovingly on the characteristics of the Celts as reflected in their poetry, and with the pride of race exults over the profound influence which it exerted on the early literature of Europe. If genius and enthusiasm could achieve such a feat the Celt has been rehabilitated by Renan.

The essay on the Paris Exhibition of 1855 is the most emphatic of Renan's numerous protests against the exaggerated estimate of the value attached in our age to the products of mechanical and manual industry, and against the worship of what, obliged to borrow an English phrase, he calls "the comfortable." Renan had too

much good sense not to see that the ancients were altogether wrong in regarding as ignominious one of the most honourable and estimable of all things, labour. Nor does he for a moment deny that "when industrial progress raises the lower classes to a higher level, and brings the nations nearer to each other, it subserves a religious and ethical purpose, and is therefore worthy of respect."

"The mistake lies not in proclaiming industry to be excellent and useful, but in exalting it beyond measure, and in attaching too much importance to perfecting its processes. If the aim of human life is well-being, it has been excellently realised in the past without any of these superfluities. . . . The useful does not ennoble: that only ennobles which presupposes in man intellectual or moral worth. Virtue, genius, science, when it is disinterested, and its only object is to satisfy the desire which leads man to penetrate the enigmas of the universe, military valour, holiness, all these are things which correspond with the moral, intellectual, or æsthetic needs of man, all these can ennoble. . . . But what is merely useful will never ennoble. On the front of that ephemeral palace, and by the side of names immortal in science, I see others, no doubt honourable, which it is wished to inscribe in the *livre d'or* of glory; they will not figure in it. Industry renders immense services to society, but they are services which after all are repaid in money. To every one his own reward; to the man whose usefulness is of the earth, earthy, wealth, happiness in the earthly meaning of the word, all earthly blessings; to genius, to virtue, to glory, nobleness. The man of genius has a right to only one thing, that life shall not be made for him impossible or insupportable. The man of utility has a right to only one thing, that of being rewarded in proportion to his services. This is so true that the only members of the industrial order who have really forced their way into the Temple of Glory are those who have been persecuted or unrecognised. It was supremely unjust that Jacquard," the ill-fated inventor of the silk-loom which

bears his name, "should not have been rich, and because he lived and died poor glory has been justly decreed to him. In point of fact, the qualities which make the industrialist do in no way exclude, but they do not necessarily presuppose a great moral elevation, and Jacquard's poverty proves more in favour of his character than even the name of the machine to which his own remains attached. . . . Far from us be those lamentations of the peevish, whose sympathies are confined to one epoch or one form of the past, who persist with a sort of defiance of opinion in calling perversion what others call progress. Of what use would history be to us if it did not teach us the greatest caution in distributing praise and blame to revolutions which are in course of accomplishment, and the last results of which have not yet been made clear? Besides, censure would be here as misplaced as enthusiasm. Our century is tending neither towards the good nor the bad; it is tending towards mediocrity. Whatever succeeds in our day is mediocre. It cannot be denied that a great deal of evil has been removed from the world by a general application to pursuits which, though trivial, are inoffensive enough. But has this been profitable to what is great in the development of man? Is this hurrying crowd beneath those crystal arches more enlightened, more moral, more truly religious than people were two centuries ago? It may be doubted. It does not seem as if many persons came out of the Palace of the Exhibition better than they entered it. It must even be added that the object of the exhibitors would not have been exactly attained if every visitor had been wise enough to say as he left the building: 'What a number of things there are which I can do without!'"

A strange gospel to preach to luxurious and glittering Paris in the palmiest days of the Second Empire!

Renan's Semitic studies had been hitherto devoted to subjects interesting mainly to scholars. They were now to contribute to the instruction and enjoyment of a much wider circle of readers. In 1859 and 1860 appeared the translations into his own beautiful French

of two books of the Old Testament, most diverse in matter and manner, Job and the Song of Solomon. His French versions of them were preceded by elaborate and elucidatory dissertations. A brief statement may be given of Renan's view of the authorship and age of the Book of Job, which by common consent is to be considered one of the noblest of literary works. Renan regards the author as a Hebrew, deeply versed in the wisdom of such Semitic tribes bordering on Palestine as the Temanites, to whom Eliphaz, one of the chief interlocutors, belonged—wisdom with which Solomon was familiar, and to the Idumean reputation for which Jeremiah bore testimony when he wrote, "Concerning Edom thus saith the Lord of hosts: Is wisdom no more in Teman? is counsel perished from the prudent? is their wisdom vanished?" The scene and personages of the poem are Idumean, and but for the Hebrew name by which the Deity is called, and the fact that the book as we have it is in Hebrew, there is such an entire absence in it of references to anything specifically Jewish, that it might have been written by an Idumean sage. As regards the time at which the Book of Job was written, Renan refers, on grounds interesting chiefly to experts, the date of its composition to or about the year 770 before Christ, towards the epoch of Uzziah, King of Judah, and of Menahem, King of Israel, in the age of Amos, of Hosea, and of Isaiah. "Rome did not as yet exist, Greece possessed harmonious songs, but did not know how to write. Egypt, Assyria, Iran (enclosed in Bactriana), India, China, were already old with intellectual, political, and religious revolutions, when an unknown

sage, who had remained faithful to the spirit of the days of yore, wrote for mankind that sublime controversy in which the doubts and sufferings of all the ages were to find so eloquent an expression."

The writer of the Book of Job believed no longer in the old patriarchal theory, which associated worldly prosperity with goodness, and inflicted earthly penalties on the evil-doer. This theory broke down, according to Renan, when the Semites came into contact with, and to some extent adopted, an alien and corrupt civilisation, about ten centuries before Christ. "Then were seen fortunate scoundrels, tyrants rewarded, robbers borne in honour to the tomb, whilst the just man was despoiled and reduced to beg his bread." The feeling of injustice created by such a state of things might have been silenced if the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and of a future state of rewards and punishments, had been firmly held. But with the Semites "man after death descended to *Sheol*, a subterranean abode which it is often difficult to distinguish from the tomb, and in which the dead retained a vague existence analogous to that of the Manes of Greek and Roman antiquities, and, above all, to that of the shadowy beings of the *Odyssey*."

"For a moment, now and then, Job seems to uplift the veil of beliefs that are to come. He hopes that God will give him in *Sheol* a place apart, where he will remain in reserve until he returns to life. He knows that he will be avenged, and, overleaping death in his vivid intuition of future justice, he declares that his skeleton will behold God. But these flashes of light are always followed by the profoundest gloom. The old patriarchal conception returns and weighs upon him with all its weight. The spectacle of man's

misery, the destruction worked by nature, that horrible indifference of death striking down alike the just man and the sinner, the happy and the unfortunate, bring him again to despair. In the epilogue he simply falls back on the theory which he tried for a moment to overleap. Job is avenged. His fortune is restored to him doubled. He dies old and full of days."

Renan thinks that in this way the problem is not solved. The close of the poem is but a return to the old patriarchal theory, worldly prosperity rewarding the just man,—a doctrine against the truth of which all that Job has said and all experience protest. The problem, indeed, is, according to Renan, insoluble.

"There are problems which we cannot solve, but which we can transcend. The destiny of man is one of them. Those whom it holds fast perish. The secret of life is to be reached by those alone who know how to stifle the sadness within them, how to do without hope, how to silence those enervating doubts which arrest the progress of only the feeble-minded and of epochs of weariness. What matters the reward when the work done is so beautiful that it holds within itself the promise of the infinite? . . .

"Three thousand years have passed since the problem exercised the sages of Idumea, and in spite of the progress of the philosophical method the problem cannot be said to be a step nearer solution. Regarded from the point of view of individual rewards and punishments, it is with an energetic denial that God will for ever visit the clumsy apologists who desire to defend Providence on that hopeless basis. The shock felt by the Psalmist on *beholding the peace of the sinner*, Job's wrath at the prosperity of the wicked, are in all ages justifiable feelings. But we have learned that which neither the Psalmist nor the author of the Book of Job could understand, that which could be revealed only by the sequence of schools of thought following each other, by the blending of races, by a long education of the moral sense. It is, that beyond the chimerical justice which the superficial common sense of every age has been desirous of finding

in the government of the universe, we find a far higher law and regulating tendency, without a knowledge of which human affairs are nothing more than a tissue of iniquity. The future of the individual man has become no clearer, and perhaps it is well that a veil should cover for ever truths which have a value only when they are the fruit of a heart that is pure. But there is one word, pronounced neither by Job nor his friends, which has acquired a lofty significance and value. Duty, with its incalculable philosophical consequences, by imposing its authority on all, resolves every doubt, reconciles every contradiction, and serves as a foundation on which to reconstruct what reason destroys or allows to crumble away. Thanks to this revelation which has in it nothing equivocal or obscure, we declare that he who chooses the Good is the true wise man. He will be immortal, for his works will live in the ultimate triumph of justice, the sum of the divine work which is accomplished by humanity. Humanity produces the divine as the spider spins its web. The march of the world is enveloped in darkness, but its progress is towards the divine. While the wicked, the silly, or the frivolous man will wholly die, in the sense that he will leave nothing to the general result of the labour of mankind, the man devoted to whatsoever is good and beautiful will participate in the immortality of that which he has loved. Who is there to-day that lives with as much of life as the obscure Galilean, who eighteen hundred years ago cast into the world the sword which divides us, and the word which unites us? Thus the works of the man of genius and of the man of worth alone escape the general decay, for they alone count for anything in the sum of the acquisitions of the race, and the fruit of their labours continues to grow even when forgotten by ungrateful humanity. Nothing is lost. The good done by the most unknown of virtuous men weighs more in the everlasting scales than the most insolent triumphs of untruth and of evil. Whatever the form he may give to his beliefs, in whatever symbol he may choose to clothe his averments regarding the future, the just man has thus the right to say with the old patriarch of Idumea, 'For I know that my avenger liveth, and will appear at last upon the earth. When my skin shall have fallen into shreds, and my flesh be taken from me, I shall see God. I shall see him by myself; my eyes, not

another's, shall behold him. With waiting my reins are consumed within me.'"[1]

In my humble judgment the patriarch's speech in Renan's own version may have more meaning than he has just assigned to it. But to be virtuous for the sake of virtue alone, without regard to any reward possibly attendant on it; to avoid evil, without any regard to the punishment possibly awaiting it; to be content with an immortality of result, and to pine for no other immortality;—this was the noble doctrine then taught by Renan to a generation delivered over to superstition or unbelief. Indeed, in one of his books Renan makes the curious and suggestive remark that if goodness inevitably brought worldly prosperity in its train, mere cunning and calculation would make the earthiest and most worthless of men take to the practice of virtue, as the safest of speculations and investments. Where, then, would be the charm and the value of righteousness?

From the Book of Job, with its passionate questionings of destiny, its gloom broken only by a few rare flashes of lightning, the distance is great to the Song of Solomon, redolent of Love and Spring. Following the German

[1] It may be as well to give the words of Renan's translation of the famous passage which has been the theme of unending controversy:—"Car, je le sais, mon vengeur existe et il apparaîtra enfin sur la terre. Quand cette peau sera tombée en lambeaux, privé de ma chair, je verrai Dieu. Je le verrai par moi-même; mes yeux le contempleront, non ceux d'un autre; mes reins se consument d'attente au dedans de moi." In an explanatory note Renan adds, "Job surrenders himself to the hope that some day, when he is reduced to a skeleton, God will descend to earth and avenge Job of his adversaries."

critics, especially Ewald, Renan dismisses all the allegorical interpretations of this unique product of Hebrew genius, especially that interpretation which resolves the love of the Shulamite and her swain into an allegory of the mystic union of Christ and the Church. Many years before Renan, Ewald had, by ingenious rearrangements and transpositions of the otherwise perplexing and incoherent original, framed out of it a lovely lyrical drama, in which Renan sees a certain political significance. The Shulamite, a beautiful rustic maiden from the North, has been carried off by the satellites of Solomon and added to his harem. He addresses her in language of passionate admiration, and offers her all that his wealth can bestow; but in spite of this she remains faithful to her shepherd-lover, and at last is reunited to him. Ewald's four acts become five in the hands of Renan, who makes several alterations in Ewald's rearrangement of the original, and thus one of the obscurest books of the Old Testament becomes a most intelligible, interesting, romantic, and delightful Hebrew vaudeville of true love resisting temptation and triumphing at last. Renan supposes it to have been written in Northern Palestine about the middle of the tenth century B.C., soon after the separation of Israel from Judah. The Shulamite's rejection of Solomon and her disdain of the Jerusalemite women who play the part of chorus in the little drama, harmonise with the feeling in the new kingdom against the personal extravagance of Solomon, and the exactions which had driven Israel to revolt. The scene is, of course, laid in Jerusalem, but the home of the Shulamite, and most of the localities mentioned in the poem, are in the northern

kingdom, and its beauty and fertility, with its wealth of woodland and meadow-land and running waters, were better calculated than the sterile region of the South to inspire the pastoral poetry with which the Song of Solomon teems.

To his French version of the Canticle, divided, like an ordinary drama, into acts and scenes, with the speeches, as in an ordinary play-book, properly assigned to the *dramatis personæ*, and the lyrics to the chorus, Renan prefixes not only an essay on the plan, the age, and the character of the poem, but a second French translation in which the order of the accepted text is preserved. This was for the benefit of those who might reject Renan's theory of the dramatic origin of the poem, or who would like to form a theory of their own, or who adhered to the orthodox allegorical interpretation. It is interesting to see Renan in his preface sympathising, and evidently in all sincerity, with the orthodox, whose time-honoured beliefs he was here and elsewhere conscientiously, but almost regretfully, disturbing. Much in the tone and tenor of some of his subsequent, and more important writings, is explained in the following extract from the preface to his translation and adaptation of the Song of Solomon. Speaking of those who have "known the Canticle only through the mystic veil with which it has been surrounded by the religious consciousness of centuries," he continues :—

"These are the persons to collide with whose habits of thought, naturally costs me most. Never can one, without a scruple, raise a hand against those sacred documents on which the hopes of eternity have been founded or supported, or rectify, in the name of

scientific criticism, those mistakes which for ages have consoled mankind, have aided it to traverse so many barren deserts, and have enabled it to conquer truths far superior to those of philosophy. It is better for men to have hoped for the Messiah than to have correctly understood such and such a passage of Isaiah, in which they thought they saw him announced; it is better for them to have believed in the resurrection than to have correctly read and understood such and such an obscure passage in the Book of Job, through a belief in which they asserted their future deliverance" from Sheol. "Where should we be if the contemporaries of Christ had been as excellent philologists as Gesenius? Faith in the resurrection and in the Messiah have led men to do much greater things than have been done by the scientific accuracy of the grammarian. But the greatness of the modern spirit consists in not sacrificing one of the legitimate needs of human nature to another; our hopes no longer depend on the right or wrong interpretation of a text. Besides, every one puts his belief into a text much more than he extracts a belief from it. Those who require the authority of Job for their faith in the future will not believe the Hebrew scholar who exhibits to them his doubts and his objections. Without troubling themselves about various readings they will boldly say with humanity: *De terrâ surrecturus sum.*[1] In the same way the Song of Solomon, endeared to so many devout souls, will remain what it was in spite of our demonstrations. Like an antique statue, habited like a Madonna by the piety of the Middle Ages, it will continue to command respect even when the archæologist has proved its profane origin. For my part, my object was not to withdraw the veneration paid to an image which has become sacred, but to disencumber it of its wrappings, so as to show it in its chaste nudity to the lover of ancient art."

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[1] The reference is again to the passage, Job xix. 25. Here, instead of the Vulgate "I shall arise," the Authorised Version has, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that *he* shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." The Douay Version is, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day *I* shall arise out of the earth."

Many men, once attached to the Christian faith, turn on their old *credo* and, like Lamennais, rend it when they have abandoned it. Renan was not one of these. When he parted from his early faith it was in sorrow not in anger, and he generally thought and spoke of it with a regretful reverence, arising from a perfect knowledge of its value, as held in perfect sincerity by simple-minded people who, like himself, had received it without examination.

CHAPTER V.

[1860-61.]

THE time was now come when an unforeseen stroke of good fortune was to hasten the execution of the great task which had floated before Renan's mind ever since he left St. Sulpice, and which had acquired consistency during years of preparatory study prosecuted in the midst of multifarious intellectual and literary labours. In the May of 1860, the year in which was published his version of the Song of Solomon, Renan was commissioned by the Imperial Government to explore the ancient Phœnicia in search of inscriptions and monuments. There had been previously a few "finds" of Phœnician inscriptions in regions where the Phœnicians had settlements; if Phœnicia proper were explored more might be expected, along with discoveries of memorials and monuments of that interesting people of Semitic speech.

Renan and his colleagues of the *Journal des Débats* were Liberals, and had resented the *coup d'état* of Napoleon III. (1851). But as the years wore on they began to hope for, and even to believe in, the establishment of a Liberal empire. With Prince Napoleon ("Plon-Plon"),

whose Liberalism was decidedly advanced, and who courted the company of men of letters, Renan seems to have been becoming so intimate as to accompany the Prince some years afterwards on a yachting tour to Northern Europe. But the person to whom Renan appears to have been mainly indebted was a lady, a Madame Cornu, whose mother had belonged to the household of Queen Hortense, the mother of Napoleon III., and who herself was brought up in, and for many years after the downfall of the First Empire remained a member of, that household. A year younger than the infant who was to become Napoleon III., she and Louis were close friends from childhood. They played together and learned their lessons together, and their innocent intimacy survived in all its strength even after she became a wife, until the *coup d'état*. This she viewed with a repugnance which estranged her from its author. She is described by Renan, in an interesting sketch of her, as a woman of great accomplishments, a thorough Liberal in politics and religion, whose absorbing desire was to see France occupying an intellectual primacy in Europe. Partly to forward this consummation she resumed her intimacy with her old playmate, now Emperor, and she exerted over him an influence always directed to promote worthy objects. The improvement of the higher education of France, and the re-establishment of scientific missions during the closing half of the Second Empire, were largely due to her, and among these missions was Renan's to Phœnicia, which, with a heart softened towards the empire, he accepted, receiving at the same time the Cross of the Legion of Honour.

A rather curious coincidence of circumstances favoured the success of his Phœnician mission. In the autumn of 1860 there were very serious disturbances in the Lebanon. That mysterious tribe, the Druses, had been massacring their old enemies, the Maronites, whom, as they were, after a fashion, Latin Christians, the French government, following its traditional policy in Syria, decided on protecting; and the massacre was followed by a very sanguinary one of the Christian population of Damascus. After the usual diplomatic controversy, a French force landed in August at Beyrout, and was there when Renan reached it in October. He found himself not only among his countrymen, but the French general in command told off little contingents of soldiers to protect his person and give him manual aid in the conduct of his explorations. The results of these, and they yielded him much more in the way of Phœnician memorials and monuments than of inscriptions, were given to the world in the magnificent volume, with an accompanying one of plates, the *Mission de Phénicie*, the issue of which began in 1864. The book is geographical, topographical, historical, ethnological, and descriptive, as well as archæological, and much of it is interesting to the general reader. From his observation of two different types among the inhabitants Renan was confirmed in an old theory of his, that although the language of the Phœnicians was Semitic, they were originally Hamitic, and of a race kindred to that of the population of ancient Egypt. If this were so, Renan's theory of the monotheism of the Semites would not be disturbed by the polytheism of the Phœnicians.

But for Renan his Syrian sojourn afforded an episode

of travel far more important to himself and to the world than his excursions in search of inscriptions and monuments in Phœnicia. He had now the long-wished-for opportunity to visit the Holy Land, and to familiarise himself with the aspects of regions and places associated for ever with the biography of the Founder of Christianity. His affectionate and sympathetic sister had accompanied him and Madame Renan to Beyrout, and she remained with him when his wife was forced to return home. It was in his sister's company that he wrote the first draft of his Life of Jesus, during a holiday sojourn on a spur of the Lebanon, some eight hours from Beyrout, and near Byblos, the head-quarters of the ancient worship of Adonis. She had listened to the story with sympathy and admiration, and his Phœnician explorations being finished, both of them were preparing to return home, when she was struck down by fever. Almost at the same moment Renan succumbed to the same disease and lay unconscious by her side. When, thirty-two hours afterwards, he recovered consciousness his sister was a corpse. Her memory will long be kept green by her brother's touching and beautiful dedication of the *Vie de Jésus*, which made its first appearance a year or two after her death.

"To the pure soul of my sister Henriette,
who died at Byblos, 24th September, 1861.

"In the bosom of God, where thou art resting, dost thou remember those long days at Ghazir, when alone with thee I wrote the pages inspired by the places which we had visited together? Thou wast silent by my side, and each page was read and copied by thee as soon as written, while sea, villages, ravines, and mountains

were unrolled at our feet. When the dazzling light gave way to the innumerable starry host, thy subtle and delicate questions, thy discreet doubts, led me back to the sublime object of the thoughts of both of us. One day thou saidst to me that thou wouldst love the book because it had been written along with thee, and also because it was a book after thine own heart. If sometimes thou wert afraid of the narrow judgment which the frivolous might pass on it, thou wast ever persuaded that the truly devout would end by taking pleasure in it. Amid these pleasant meditations death struck at both of us with his wing. At one and the same time the slumber of fever seized on us! When I awoke I was alone. Now thou sleepest in the land of Adonis, near holy Byblos, and the sacred waters with which the women celebrating the antique mysteries came to mingle their tears. To me, O kind genius, to me whom thou didst love, reveal the truths which subjugate death, which prevent us from fearing it, and which make us almost love it."

Sad and solitary, but restored to health, and carrying with him the manuscript of the *Vie de Jésus* in its first form, Renan returned to France after a twelvemonth's absence.

CHAPTER VI.

[1861-64.]

THE Collège de France, which is intimately connected with Renan's biography, was founded by Francis I., who, whatever his faults, was a patron of the Renaissance. The study of Greek and Hebrew, though the languages of the Old and New Testaments, was considered by the University of Paris to be dangerous, as tending to destroy the authority of the Vulgate, and chairs of Greek and Hebrew were first instituted in his new college by Francis I. Subsequent Kings of France added new chairs to the institution, which, remaining independent of the University, was allowed considerable liberty of teaching, and thus attracted eminent men to its chairs and studious youth to listen to their prelections. The only control over it was exercised by the government. After somewhat less than three centuries since its establishment the teaching of the Collège de France, with its twenty-five chairs, embraced nearly the whole area of modern culture, and the list of its illustrious professors ranges from Ramus in the sixteenth century

to Cuvier, Cousin, Ampère, Burnouf, and Michelet in the nineteenth.

The chair of Hebrew and cognate Semitic languages became vacant in 1857 through the death of M. Quatremère, Renan's old teacher. The way in which such vacancies were filled was the following:—When the Minister of Public Instruction decided on having the vacancy filled he asked the whole body of professors to furnish him with the names of those whom they thought most fitted for the chair. The authorship of the History of the Semitic Languages, to say nothing of his other writings, gave Renan an undoubted claim to be named as a candidate. One of the chief dreams of his early life was to restore to France the place in the cultivation of Semitic studies which she had filled until the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, when it was surrendered to Germany and Holland. To attempt this restoration the way lay through the Chair of Hebrew in the Collège de France, and Renan resolved never to accept any other. Accordingly, on the death of Quatremère he paid the customary visits to the professors of the college, and informed them of his aspiration. For some reason or other several years elapsed before the Minister of Public Instruction decided on filling the vacancy, and in the interval the duties of the chair were performed provisionally. At last the Minister asked that candidates should be nominated. Both the professors of the Collège and the Académie des Inscriptions placed Renan at the head of their lists, and in January 1862 he was appointed to the chair.

By his brilliant and somewhat daring contributions to

periodicals, of which two collections in volume-form had been issued and were very popular, as well as by his versions of, and dissertations on, the Book of Job and the Song of Solomon, Renan was known to the studious youth of academic Paris as a foremost champion of freedom of thought in religious matters. The Imperial Government, on the other hand, leant upon the Church and the priesthood; a severe religious orthodoxy was at least professedly, and in the case of the Empress Eugénie no doubt sincerely, dominant in high places. This gave a piquancy to the announcement that Renan's introductory lecture was to be on the part played by the Semitic nations in the history of civilisation. On the 21st February 1862, the hall in which the lecture was delivered was crowded with eager listeners, many of them young. Renan's thesis was one with which his readers were already familiar. There was the old contrast between the Indo-European (Aryan) and the Semitic races, a contrast, except in one respect, very unfavourable to the latter. Monotheism, once more Renan declared, the Indo-European races owe to the Semitic, an enormous debt of incalculable value. With the Roman Empire the myths of paganism had become mere amusing stories, stripped of all religious or moral significance. It was then that the civilised world was confronted by Judaism, with its clear and simple faith in divine unity. The Jews had a law, a book replete with an elevated moral sentiment and a lofty religious poetry, which gave them an incontestable superiority over the Indo-Europeans. Indeed, it was possible that the world would have been converted to Judaism had not there

sprung from it Christianity. Then came the following passage, the words italicised being those which most of all shocked the orthodox:—

"In the midst of the enormous fermentation in which the Jewish nation was steeped under the last of the Asmonæans, the most extraordinary moral event of which history has preserved the memory, took place in Galilee. A reform of Judaism, one so profound and so peculiar that it was in truth a complete creation, was worked by a man to whom no other can be compared, *a man so great that, although in this place everything ought to be judged from the point of view of positive science, I should not wish to contradict those who, struck by the exceptional character of his work, call him God.* Having attained the highest religious altitude ever reached by man before him, having arrived at a contemplation of God as standing to himself in the relation of father to son, devoted to his work with a complete forgetfulness of everything else and an abnegation of self which has never been practised on so lofty a scale, Jesus founded the everlasting religion of humanity, the religion of the spirit, liberated from everything belonging to priesthood, to ceremonial, and to ritual, accessible to every caste, in one word, absolute. 'Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. . . . The hour cometh . . . when the true worshipper shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.' Constituted was now the fruitful centre from which for centuries mankind was to derive its joys, its hopes, its consolations, its motives for righteousness."

Sprung from Judaism and Christianity in the brain and heart of the Arabian prophet, a third Semitic religion, the Mohammedan, converted, and in Africa is converting, large masses of mankind to monotheism. But whatever its services in the past, Renan from study, and from personal observation of its working in Syria, had come to the conclusion that Islam is hostile to science and to

civilisation, and that war must be waged against it "until the last son of Ishmael shall have died of misery, or shall have been relegated by terror to the depths of the desert." "Islam is the most complete negation of Europe." And to Europe, to Europe alone, Renan proclaimed, the future belongs. The religion which Europe is to diffuse throughout the world has nothing to do with ancient dogmas; it means a recognition of freedom and of the rights of man. In its theological sense it is to become less and less Jewish, and more and more the religion of the heart, divorced from any connection with the State. Science was to be the religion of the head.

The lecture delighted the youthful among his hearers. They saw very clearly that Renan had broken with the past and present of the Roman Catholic Church, and indeed with all Christian churches, and that in spite of his eloquent eulogium on Christianity as the everlasting religion, he was in reality substituting for it the religion of science. The admirers among his student-hearers, not content with applauding his lecture, enthusiastically conducted him home in triumph. It was with other feelings that Renan's deliverance was regarded by the ecclesiastics who had the ear of the Emperor or of the Empress. The tone and tenor of his prelection were utterly distasteful to them; they looked on it as a gage of defiance flung in their faces. Two passages in it were obnoxious to them: the one in which the separation of Church and State was foreshadowed; the other, that in which the Founder of Christianity was spoken of as a "man"; though, as Renan afterwards reminded them, he had on

his side the authority of St. Peter, who, addressing a Jerusalem audience on the day of Pentecost, had called Jesus "a man approved of God among you" (Acts ii. 22). Cardinals and bishops had audiences of the Empress, and insisted that Renan should be punished. Four days after the delivery of the opening lecture Renan's course was suspended by authority.

Renan took the suspension with philosophical calmness. He addressed to his fellow-professors of the Collège de France a long and admirable defence of himself, in which not an angry word escaped him. He referred to the subject in a letter written at the time to Mr., now Sir Mountstuart E. Grant Duff, who had made his acquaintance some years before, and who has given in an interesting volume,[1] memorials of an acquaintance with Renan which ripened into friendship.

"It is," Renan wrote, "the Emperor whom I most willingly forgive. Amid the burning passions which rend the country, his position is one of the most difficult. Every act of his which has a liberal tendency recoils upon him as a misdemeanour. In nominating me, in spite of the energetic opposition of the Catholic party, he acted almost courageously. . . . No other French government would have done as he did."

Being suspended, not dismissed, Renan was to receive his salary until further notice, and he honourably resolved to earn it. As he told the students at the time, his opening lecture was exceptional in its subject. For the future he would confine himself strictly to the special duty of his chair, that of giving instruction in Hebrew and other

[1] *Ernest Renan: In Memoriam.* By the Right Honourable Sir Mountstuart E. Grant Duff, G.C.S.I., F.R.S. (1893).

Semitic grammar and philology, and he expected only a small class of pupils. Now that he was suspended he invited those who would have attended his class at the Collège de France to come to him at his domicile, and receive the instruction which he was debarred from giving them officially. The invitation was accepted, and for years this domiciliary instruction was given. The subsequent story of the chair itself will be told further on.

For a year after the suspension from his chair Renan was busy completing his Life of Jesus. It appeared a little before the summer of 1863. The book was the work of a poet and an artist, as much as of a patient and erudite scholar. To long and thorough study of the texts had been added personal knowledge of the scenery and other aspects of the Holy Land, viewed, too, in the light thrown on it by its ancient describers as it was in the time of Jesus. The old landscapes were revived on Renan's canvas, the village life, the life of the synagogue; the Jerusalem of the Herods was brought near to us in the clear mirror of Renan's pages, and the panorama of Jesus's Palestine was unrolled to the music of a style incomparable in its union of simplicity and beauty. In accordance with a deep conviction which years before he had arrived at, and except in the very few cases in which the marvellous is not necessarily the miraculous, Renan rejected, with the supernatural element in the birth and biography of Jesus, the miracles which in the Gospels he was recorded to have worked. On the other hand, Renan brought into play an imagination capable of working genuine wonders when aided by a lynx-eyed as well as far-extending research. The many gaps

in the gospel narratives he fills up with marvellous ingenuity. Out of their contradictions and variations he evolves a coherent and consistent whole. He gathers into a focus their scattered rays of light. Their often vague topography and their hazy chronology, he seems to rectify with admirable ingenuity. Almost more wonderful is the skill with which he illuminates his subject by hints and statements gathered from the most unlikely sources. Of course he made use of the Old Testament, and of those Jewish apocalyptic books the composition of which began after the cessation of prophecy—to say nothing of the Fathers, of the fragments of ancient and mostly lost gospels, apocryphal and other, of Talmudic literature which he had diligently explored with unexpectedly successful results, of Philo and Josephus, and of modern explorations in Palestine. What is still more unexpected, and to quote only two of the instances of his successful vigilance, Renan finds in the chronicles of the Crusaders testimony borne to the retention, in the Middle Ages, by the Lake of Gennesareth, of a reputation for a piscine wealth as great as when Peter and Andrew and the sons of Zebedee cast their nets into it before they were made fishers of men. From a Roman inscription found in Algeria Renan deduces the remote conclusion that the soldiers of Pontius Pilate who outraged Jesus so grossly, were auxiliaries, and, not like the legionaries, Roman citizens, who would not have been guilty of such indignities. The fascination of his style tempted some people, especially the Germans—a nation whose *forte* is not style—to regard Renan as superficial. But he was justly appreciated by such a scholar as Mommsen, who, says

Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff, "called him, in conversation with me as far back as January 1862, a true *savant* in spite of his beautiful style!" From an earnest desire to figure to himself as flesh and blood realities the personages of his Christian epic, and to give completeness to the fragmentary Gospel narratives, Renan is often conjectural. His pages are full of such expressions as "perhaps, probably, no doubt," and so forth, and a faint hint is expanded and transformed into a copious and confident statement. But these conjectures and expansions are the handiwork not only of a man of genius but of one whose great object is to bring with perfect clearness before himself, and before his readers, the personages of whom, and the incidents of which, he is writing. Renan has evidently done his utmost to shake himself free of prepossessions and prejudices. He has not, like the heterodox Strauss or the modern orthodox biographers of Jesus, a preconceived theory to uphold. He is no advocate, holding and speaking from a brief. Here really seems to be a man who, treating of one of the most controverted and difficult as well as the highest of themes, has no object but the attainment of truth. Daring though the book be, it is not in the slightest degree polemical. More than once, indeed, Renan speaks of the pain given him by the thought that he may possibly be undermining the priceless faith of honest believers; and he seems perfectly sincere in the expression of the hope that they will neglect his Life of Jesus, and leave it to be read only by scholars and thinkers.

To the book Renan prefixed an introduction on his authorities. Of course they were chiefly the Four

Gospels, but his matured opinions on their genuineness and value were given in a subsequent volume of the *Origines*, and may be reserved until it calls for notice. To these Gospels had been added one of his own. The personality of Jesus came out with startling distinctness as Renan traversed the regions in which the Gospel history is laid:—

"Thus it was," he writes, "that the whole of that history, which in the distance seemed to hover in the clouds of an unreal world, acquired a substantial body and a solidity which astonished me. The striking agreement between the text of the Gospels and the localities, the marvellous harmony between the Gospel-ideal and the landscape which had served it for a frame, came upon me like a revelation. I had before my eyes a fifth Gospel, mutilated but still legible, and across the narratives of Matthew and Mark, instead of an abstract being, who might have been supposed never to have existed, I saw, living and moving, a human figure worthy of all admiration."

In the Galilee of Renan's visit he found traces of the tree-clad, verdant, flowery, fruitful, and populous land which it was before occupied and made desolate by "the demon of Islam," nor could this mar the aspects of the mountains on which Jesus loved to muse, to worship, and to pray. The race which, with foreign admixtures, unsophisticated while intelligent, inhabited Galilee in the olden time was as far superior to the narrow-minded and bigoted Jews of Jerusalem as its arid environs were inferior in picturesqueness and beauty to the northern region in which Jesus was born and bred. He grew to maturity in constant contact with Nature, and its products furnished him afterwards with many an illustration of doctrine. Almost certainly he knew no language except his

own, the Aramaic dialect generally spoken in Palestine, but in that sequestered Nazareth he learned much that Athens and Rome could not have taught him. From reading the prophets he learned to value a pure heart and a humble mind far more than the ritual which he had seen in operation during his boyish visits with his parents to Jerusalem. Doctrines of the same kind, taught by such great Rabbis as Hillel, were orally promulgated in his time. The Jewish mind was deeply stirred by hopes and anticipations of the coming of a Messiah, and was much occupied with attempts to discover, from supposed Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, in what form the promised Deliverer would appear. The mind of the young Jesus was specially impressed by the Book of Daniel, and the apocalyptic vision in which a kingdom never to be destroyed was to be set up by God. The Ancient of Days gave everlasting dominion over all the nations to "one like the Son of Man," the appellation by which Jesus afterwards loved to call himself.

What were the first steps of Jesus in his prophetic career, Renan does not venture to conjecture. But he supposes that the earlier religious conception of Jesus was that of God as a father. "That is his great original act; in that he nowise belongs to his race. Nor Jew nor Mussulman ever understood this delicious theology of love. The God of Jesus is not the terrible governor who slays us, who damns us when it pleases him. The God of Jesus is Our Father. The God of Jesus is not the unimpartial despot who has chosen Israel for his people, and protects them against all the world. He is the God of mankind." The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man,

these and what follows from them were the themes of the first preaching of Jesus, and in the Synagogue open to all, with an audience ready to listen to any one who had anything to say, he found his first pulpit. A group of sympathetic hearers, men and women, gathered round him. In his twenty-eighth year he was subjected to a new and stimulating influence, that of a man, not of a book or of current apothegms. He was attracted to the terrible Baptist declaiming on the banks of the Jordan. He now learned the effect that could be produced on the multitude by an earnest preacher. He heard not only the representatives of the two great religious parties, Pharisees and Sadducees, told to their faces that they were vipers, but something like a proclamation of the doom of Judaism, when they were also told to be proud no longer of their descent from Abraham, since the very stones could be turned into children of Abraham. John's imprisonment taught Jesus what the preacher of a pure social morality might expect from the powers of this world. After a sojourn in the desert, John being thrown into prison, Jesus returned to his native Galilee. Rejected by the people of Nazareth, his birthplace, he settled at Capernaum, one of a group of little towns on the western bank of the Lake of Gennesareth (Lake of Tiberias, Sea of Galilee), the Windermere of Palestine. Renan describes, in all its ancient beauty and picturesqueness, the region in which this ever-memorable sheet of water lies, and contrasts what it and its banks were in the time of Jesus with their generally desolate appearance as Renan saw them under the withering rule of the unspeakable Turk.

It was at Capernaum, Renan thinks, that really began the public life of Jesus, then on the verge of his thirtieth year. His conceptions both of himself and of the Kingdom of Heaven which he was to found, had received a great expansion. He was the long-expected Messiah, and the Father had given him authority over all terrestrial things. He figured himself to be that Son of Man to whom God was to delegate the power of judging the world, and of governing it for ever. The final catastrophe he proclaimed to be approaching. This was one form of the advent of the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven, which plays so great a part in the discourses of Jesus. But there was another form of it on which he laid a still greater stress—"The Kingdom of God is within you." Every one who so transformed his nature as to make himself capable of embodying in act the pure and lofty morality which Jesus taught, had the Kingdom of God within him, and might look forward, without fear, to the final catastrophe which should extirpate evil and the wicked, and leave nothing but a Kingdom of Heaven everywhere. Renan regards the sojourn of Jesus at Capernaum as the second period, and a very happy one, of his career. Here he was surrounded by the believing disciples from whom he chose his apostles, and by the devout women, some of whom followed him until his death. The magnetism of his personality, and the magic of his words, having gained them over, they soon recognised in him the superhuman person whom he represented himself to be, and they did whatever he bade them. He preached or taught in parables throughout,

in the little towns on the banks of the lake, sometimes from a boat on the lake itself, occasionally on the mountain-side, without dogma, without ritual; the Sermon on the Mount being the summary of the doctrine which he taught. His converts were chiefly among the poor, and he announced that part of his mission was to preach his Gospel to them. In them, in the outcast men and women whom the Pharisees rejected, but who had accepted him, in publicans and sinners, not in the rich and powerful, lay his hope. Riches indeed were a needless encumbrance, since the great catastrophe was at hand. So passed the days of the sojourn at Capernaum; Jesus and his "joyous company of children" being described by Renan as leading an idyllic life.

A point is now reached at which it seems opportune to indicate Renan's views on two startling phenomena in the career of Jesus, one of them the prediction, on the fulfilment of which he insisted, of the approaching end and judgment of the world; the other the series of miracles which he is said to have worked. That Jesus was mistaken in predicting the end of the world as then near at hand, goes without saying. But this mistake had a powerful effect in strengthening the faith in him, and the devotion to him, of his disciples who believed in his prophetic accuracy, to say nothing of the generations which, after his death, awaited his coming with a perfect assurance of its approach. Yet it must be remembered, Renan remarks, that although Jesus announced the approaching consummation of all things, he framed a code of ethics and gave directions to his apostles for continuing their mission, just as if he believed that the world was to endure.

"There is no attempting to deny the existence of a contradiction between the belief in the near approach of the end of the world, on the one hand, and, on the other, the ethics habitually inculcated by Jesus, and conceived as if a stable condition of humanity were contemplated. It was precisely this contradiction which secured the success of his work. The millenarian alone would have produced nothing durable; the moralist alone would have produced nothing that had potency. Millenarianism gave the impulse, morality made the future assured. Thus Christianity combined the two conditions of great successes in this world, a revolutionary point of departure and the possibility of continuing to live. Whatever is intended to succeed should supply these two wants, for the world desires at once to alter and to last. While announcing an unparalleled subversion of human affairs, Jesus proclaimed the principles on which for eighteen hundred years society has reposed."

In dealing with the question of miracles Renan felt that he was treading on delicate ground. He could easily have evaded the difficult problem by asserting that the narratives of miracles in the Gospels did not form any part of them in their original form, and had been intruded into them by pious interpolations of the second Christian generation. Allowance being made for many such interpolations, it is however impossible, Renan declares, with such testimony as is accumulated in the Gospels, not to believe that Jesus played the part of a miracle-worker, and Renan does not believe in miracles at all. Since he thought so it was courageous and candid in him to speak of Jesus as a "thaumaturgist," for Renan knew both that the statement would give great offence even to friends, and that it did not harmonise with the pure and lofty morality of which he always, except in this case, represents Jesus to have been a pattern. But he accompanies his painful admission with all sorts of reservations, modifications,

and palliations. Every religious founder, from Buddha to Mahomet, is believed by his followers to have worked miracles. If Jesus had not been supposed to have worked miracles his mission would have failed. He had not that knowledge of the laws of nature which every school-boy now possesses. He believed that his Father in Heaven had bestowed on him all power over the lower world, a power which he was even allowed to delegate to his apostles. Many of his alleged miracles, moreover, were cures of diseases, and the science of medicine being then unknown in Judea, it was supposed that, disease being often regarded as the work of demons in possession of the bodies of the afflicted, it was part of the functions of a man of superior sanctity to cure them. In such cases is it not natural, Renan asks, that the contact of a saintly personage should so work on the imagination of the patient as to give him relief? Above all, those who narrate the miracles tell of the frequent reluctance of Jesus to attempt them, and on the injunction which he sometimes lays on those whom he seems to have cured not to spread abroad the news of their recovery. On the whole, Renan thinks that if Jesus played the part of a "thaumaturgist," it was much against his will.

The third period of the career of Jesus opens with his important sojourn in Jerusalem, when he was in his thirty-second year, according to Renan's hypothesis. With faith in himself and his mission growing more intense with time, Jesus felt ever greater repugnance for the narrow-minded Jews of Jerusalem, for hypocritical Pharisees and sceptical Sadducees, for a

formalist priesthood, and for the wrangling disputants in the Temple, itself polluted by money-changers and vendors of living things to be offered as sacrifices. The effect produced on him by this visit to Jerusalem was such, according to Renan, that Jesus now resolved to break for ever with Judaism and to pronounce the death-warrant of the Law. Hence the beautiful parable of the Good Samaritan, hence the memorable close of the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, already quoted, hence the scattered indications in his discourses that, expecting nothing from the Jews as a nation, he looked to the conversion of the Gentiles. In this frame of mind, "full of revolutionary ardour" Renan phrases it, Jesus returned to Galilee, and in the same frame of mind left his native region for ever to proceed to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, which was celebrated at the autumnal equinox. Disputes with Pharisees visiting Galilee were followed by argumentations with the Pharisees in Jerusalem which issued in their attempt to stone him. During this last period of the life of Jesus Renan fancies that he sees a change in the demeanour and disposition of Jesus. Jerusalem, which had neglected him, now persecuted him, and he saw no hope of the advent of the Kingdom of God unless when he himself should come in glory to reward his disciples and to punish those who had rejected him. The tone of the Sermon on the Mount was changed for one of denunciation. Renan even speaks of him as a "sombre giant." His original gentleness disappeared. He was subject to fits of agonised depression. His disciples themselves were occasionally afraid of him.

"His dissatisfaction with any resistance led him to actions inexplicable and apparently absurd," such as the denunciation of the fig-tree for bearing nothing but leaves at a time when it could not bear fruit. "It was not that his nobleness of nature was on the wane, but that his struggle maintained in the name of the ideal against reality became insupportable. Contact with the earth lacerated and revolted him. He was irritated by the obstacles which confronted him. His conception of himself as Son of God became confused and exaggerated. He felt the application of the fatal law which condemns the idea to fall away as soon as it attempts the conversion of men. By coming into contact with men they lowered him to their own level. The tone which he had adopted could not be kept up for more than a few months. It was time for death to come and put an end to a situation the tension of which had become excessive, time for it to come and release him from the impossibilities of a path which led nowhere, and by delivering him from too protracted a probation, conduct him, thenceforth incapable of sin, to celestial serenity."

The remainder of the book contains a narrative of the intrigues of the enemies of Jesus at Jerusalem and of the other circumstances which resulted in his death on the cross. The sad story is vividly told, and is elucidated from the stores of Renan's extensive knowledge of things Jewish; but in this case the Gospel narratives, taken altogether, are ample and continuous, and do not readily lend themselves to much originality of treatment.

Two points in Renan's later narrative may be touched on. He suggests, or rather hints, not at all acceptably, that what he regarded as the imaginary resurrection at Bethany—the report of which as a reality so exasperated the Jewish hierarchy against Jesus—was a pious fraud contrived by Mary and Martha to confirm the claim of Jesus to superhuman power. Then as regards the

Eucharistic procedure of Jesus on the occasion of the Last Supper, Renan takes advantage of the singular silence on the subject in the account given in the Gospel of St. John to suggest that it was an observance long practised by Jesus, leaving it to be implied that on this point the narrative of the Synoptics is redundant.

Such is a brief and meagre outline of Renan's famous work, an outline intended to indicate to those who have not read it his method of dealing with the Gospel narratives, his theory of the spiritual development of Jesus, and other characteristics of the epoch-making volume which render it such a contrast to the modern orthodox biographies of the Founder of Christianity. Finally, in Renan's own words, so far at least as I can reproduce in English his inimitable French, let there be given the closing passage of the book:—

"The sublime personage, who still with each day presides over the destiny of the world, it is allowable to call Divine, not in the sense that Jesus absorbed all that is divine, but in the sense that it is he by whom his species has been made to take the greatest step towards the Divine. Collective humanity presents an assemblage of mean and egoistic beings superior to the animal only in that their egoism is more the result of reflection. But in the midst of this uniform vulgarity there rise towards the sky columns which attest a nobler destiny. Jesus is the loftiest of those columns which indicate to man whence it is that he comes and whither he ought to tend. In Jesus has been concentrated and condensed all that is good and elevated in our nature. He was not incapable of sin. The passions which he conquered are those against which we ourselves make war. No angel of God other than his own righteous conscience, comforted him. He was tempted by no Satan other than the satan who is in the heart of each of us. And just as several of his great characteristics have been lost to us through the defects of his

disciples, so too it is probable that many of his shortcomings have been concealed. But never was there any one who so much as he made the interests of humanity predominant in his life over the pettiness of self-love. Unreservedly devoted to his idea, to it he subordinated everything, to such an extent that towards the end of his life the universe itself ceased for him to exist. It was because he was thus possessed by a heroic will that he conquered heaven. There never was a man, with perhaps the exception of Buddha, who to that extent trampled under his feet the family, the joys and cares of this world. He lived only in his Father and in the divine mission which he was convinced it was for him to fulfil.

"It is for us, children ever, condemned to impotence, who work and do not reap, who will never see the fruit of what we have sown, it is for us to bend the knee before these demi-gods. They knew how to do what we know not how to do—they could create, affirm, act. Will there be a renascence of that grand originality, or will the world be content henceforth to follow the road opened for us by those daring creators of the antique ages? We know not. But whatever may be the unexpected phenomena of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed. His worship will unceasingly renew its youth; his legends will be the source of endless tears; the best of hearts will be melted by his sufferings; all the ages will proclaim that among the sons of men there has not been born one greater than Jesus."

So closes the first volume of the Origins of Christianity, the great work which Renan had been, in one way or another, preparing for many years. The success of the Life of Jesus was immediate and immense. Five months after its publication Renan told Sir M. E. Grant Duff that when the eleventh edition, then being issued, was disposed of, there would be 66,000 copies in circulation, and that there were already two German and two Dutch translations of it, with one Italian. An English translation appeared in the year of the publication of the original. An eighteenth

edition is before me, and it is credibly reported that of the work in one way or another half a million copies have been circulated. A very numerous class, in France and out of it, who could not accept the Christology of the orthodox churches, felt that Christianity and its Founder deserved other treatment than that received from Voltaire, and they welcomed Renan's book as an adequate appreciation of the character and career of Jesus with the discredited supernatural element in his biography excluded. Even because Jesus ceased in Renan's pages to be God, he could be sympathised with and understood as a man, a unique man, yet one of like passions with ourselves. What else was required to complete the success of the book was supplied by the exquisite art displayed in the portrait of Jesus, in the sympathetic sketches of his followers, in the picturesqueness of the description of his and their surroundings, in the charm and music of a style of magical fascination, and in the new light thrown on the Gospel narratives by Renan's unwearied vigilance of research.

But that which constituted for the mass of readers a powerful attraction, aroused the wrathful indignation of the orthodox everywhere, and especially of the Roman Catholic Church in France. Renan's possible Jesus was preferred by multitudes to the impossible Jesus of orthodoxy, but the spokesmen of Roman Catholicism treated Renan as an arch-blasphemer who had made of the second person of the Trinity a mere peccable man. French Catholicism could not bring Renan to the stake, but it exhausted the modern methods of persecution. Archbishops and bishops fulminated

against him in their charges, and an innumerable host of vituperative and sometimes libellous pamphleteers denounced him as actually bent on bringing about the reign of the devil upon earth. One jealously orthodox lady sent him periodically a missive containing only the brief warning, "There is a hell!" These denunciations continued for months, and though Renan bore them with silent equanimity, they issued in one result of a kind more disagreeable to him than the ravings of bigotry. At Court the Life of Jesus had been received, not with favour, but with perhaps unexpected toleration. That pillar of the Roman Catholic Church in France, the Empress Eugénie, refused to attempt to stop the publication of the book, and even said to Madame Cornu, who reported to Sir M. E. Grant Duff the Imperial lady's remark, "It will do no harm to those who believe in Christ, and to those who do not it will do good." But the persistent, the passionate protests of the Roman Catholic hierarchy told at last on the Emperor, who looked on the support of the Church as one of the bulwarks of his throne, and who, as Renan said, never took a step forward without soon afterwards taking a step backwards. Renan's free-speaking, in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Hebrew at the Collège de France, had led to his suspension. In deference to the loud and long-continued clamours against his Life of Jesus, he was now to be deprived of his chair. Early in June 1864, nearly a twelvemonth after the appearance of the book, there appeared in the *Moniteur* a report addressed to the Emperor by the Minister of Public Instruction. This functionary recommended the establishment of a new

chair of Comparative Grammar and Philology in the Collège de France. The salary of the new chair not having appeared in the Budget, it was to be furnished from the funds voted for the chair of Hebrew. This chair had not been occupied for two years, and the Minister very ungraciously spoke of the anomaly involved in the reception of a salary for duties which were not performed, ignoring the fact that, since his suspension, Renan had been giving instruction, twice a week, at his own house, to those who would have attended his prelections had he been allowed to perform the duties of his chair at the Collège de France. As a compensation to the thus deprived professor the Minister proposed that Renan should be appointed to the post of assistant-director in the manuscript department of the Bibliothèque Impériale, "where his special erudition would enable him to render real service to the public." Imperial decrees followed, embodying the recommendations of the report. This was in effect to deprive Renan of his professorship, since it was not legal for an official of the Bibliothèque Impériale to be at the same time a professor in the service of the State. It was impossible for Renan to accept in silence his virtual dismissal, and the offer of compensation attached to it. He addressed to the Minister a dignified letter, declining both to resign his professorship and to accept the new position offered him. He pointed out that he had really been discharging the duties of his chair. He added, with a touch of excusable if rather bitter sarcasm, "Science measures desert by the results produced, not by the more or less punctual execution of a regulation, and if ever you reproach a scholar with not earning the slender

sum allotted to him, believe, M. le Ministre, that he will give you the reply which I now give you, following an illustrious example: *Pecunia tua tecum sit*"—a judiciously abridged version of the Apostle Peter's apostrophe to Simon Magus, *Pecunia tua tecum sit in perditionem*, the rendering of which in our authorised version, "Thy money perish with thee" (Acts viii. 20), is not easily, as in the case of the Vulgate, robbed of its chief sting. In a few days appears a final Imperial decree, setting forth that after having been relieved of his professorial functions at the Collège de France, and appointed to a post in the Bibliothèque Impériale, Renan has declined to accept the post, and asserts that he still retains the first appointment, therefore his Majesty the Emperor announces that Renan's appointment to the Bibliothèque Impériale is revoked, and that his appointment to the Collège de France remains revoked. Renan was now thrown again on his own resources. His former post in the great Bibliothèque he had resigned when appointed to the Phœnician mission, and thus he had no longer an official income. Fortunately, the pecuniary results of his highly successful Life of Jesus were considerable.

Of course the chiefs of French criticism bestowed on the Life of Jesus a reception very different from the long-drawn howl of execration with which it was greeted by the representatives of French clericalism. The review of it by Renan's friend, Sainte-Beuve, was a masterpiece of dexterous and appreciative criticism. While warmly praising the extraordinary merit of the book, he asserted that it pleased the sceptics just as little as the believers. The effect on members of

both these classes, and of a third indefinable one, he illustrated in reports of confidences (possibly imaginary) on the subject, bestowed on him by three friends. The first is an orthodox Catholic, indignant but not abusive. He maintains that to believe in the tradition of the Church, and accept the universal assent based on the testimony of the first and only witnesses of the Christian era, is as rational as to believe in Renan's numerous hypotheses and conjectures. The second friend is a sceptic who is irritated by Renan's transcendent admiration of Jesus, and complains that if Renan deprives Jesus of his Godhead he makes Jesus a man such as none has ever been, above humanity, and divine in everything but name. For his own part the sceptic likes the old Jesus quite as much as the new. The third friend is a politician and man of the world, who dilates on the benefits conferred on society and individuals by the ancient faiths, and thinks it therefore very dangerous to meddle with them.

The ablest of the criticisms by non-orthodox writers on the Life of Jesus was that of Edmond Scherer, now almost as well known in England as Sainte-Beuve. In a few sentences he thus sums up the characteristic merits of Renan's book:—"He has sought for Christ beyond the religion which bears his name, and the Gospel beneath what the Church has founded on it. He has succeeded in restoring the physiognomy of Jesus, in giving us a distinct, living, and verisimilar personality." But with all his appreciation Scherer is not sparing of more or less inculpatory criticisms. One of these commends itself specially to English readers of the Life of Jesus. Renan occasionally delineates Jesus from too

æsthetic a point of view, and even invests him with a kind of prettiness which one is glad to see censured by a French critic. The frequent use of the French equivalents of such adjectives as delicious, delicate, etc., and the reference to Jesus as "le charmant Docteur," are repugnant to English taste if not to French. More important are Scherer's comments on Renan's treatment of the miracles of Jesus. Scherer will not admit that "Jesus lent himself, though unwillingly, to play the part of a thaumaturgist." His character, so full of simplicity and candour, so devoid of personal ambition, refutes Renan's theory. And why detach the miracles of Jesus from the great mass of miracles with traditions of which the history of the world is full? Protestants accept the miracles of Jesus while they wholly reject those recorded in the *Acta Sanctorum*, though many of these are very much better attested than any which figure in the New Testament. And with regard to the miracles of the *Acta Sanctorum* Scherer makes a very acute and pregnant remark. When reading the lives of some of the greatest of the miracle-working saints, Scherer observed that the simplest and most unpretending of the marvels, mostly cases of what were more or less diseases of the nerves, are reported by those who were nearest to the time when the cures were effected, and that as time rolled on the marvels become more and more extravagant, in point of fact miraculous, through the growth around them of legend upon legend. Look at the miracles of the Gospels from this point of view and the problem is almost solved. The true miracles of Jesus were his cures of nervous and mental diseases, the sufferers from which were supposed in his

time to be possessed by demons. Under certain psychological conditions, under the sway of an intense religious life, there may have been manifested a curative power which we cannot in these days study directly, because it tends more and more to disappear with the growth of modern civilisation. Admit these so-called miracles, and reject as legendary all such as the stilling of a tempest or the resuscitation of the dead. In this connection Scherer thinks that while rejecting most of the discourses of Jesus given in the fourth Gospel, Renan would have done well also to reject the whole of its narrative, with the exception of the four concluding chapters. In this way the resurrection of Lazarus would have been relegated to the world of legend, and Renan would not have been tempted to hint that it was a pious fraud. Let it be added that a cheap popular edition of the Life of Jesus, abridged and simplified, was issued in 1864, the year after the appearance of the first, and that Renan omitted in it the chapter on miracles and the story of the resurrection of Lazarus.

In the correspondence of two more or less distinguished contemporaries of Renan in the French world of letters, I have found some not uninteresting references, made just after its appearance, to the Life of Jesus. In one of his *Lettres à une Inconnue* the sceptical and cynical Prosper Merimée speaks of the book as at once "of little and of much importance." It is a great blow dealt to the Catholic Church. So far doubtless so good. But then, "the author is so terrified at his own audacity in denying the divinity" of Jesus, "that he loses himself in hymns of admiration and adora-

tion, so that he is left without a philosophic sense with which to judge the doctrine. However, it is interesting." The other reference is in a letter of George Sand to Prince Napoleon, with whom she was on terms of very friendly intercourse, and who had asked for her opinion of the book, one which he appears to have greatly admired. Her remarks on Christianity in the following passage must be taken in connection with the fact that, when she wrote, the priesthood and Catholicism, partly through the patronage extended to them under the Empire, were regaining, even among the middle classes, something of their old influence in the country of Voltaire:—

"M. Renan," she writes to her "*cher* prince," "has a little lowered, on one side, his hero in my estimation, while raising him on the other. I liked to persuade myself that Jesus had never believed himself to be God, had never proclaimed himself to be specially the Son of God, and that his belief in an avenging and penal God was an apocryphal interpolation added to the Gospels. This, at least, is the interpretation which I had always accepted and even sought for; but now comes M. Renan with the results of deeper, more competent, more strenuous study and examination. There is no need to be as learned as he is to be conscious in his work of realities and appreciations forming a whole, and beyond discussion. Were it only through its colouring and life, a perusal of the book suffuses a clearer light on the age, the environment, the man.

"I think then that he has seen Jesus better than we in our anterior perceptions of him, and I accept the Jesus which he has given us. Jesus is no longer a philosopher, a *savant*, a genius concentrating in himself what was best in the philosophy and knowledge of his time; he is a dreamer, an enthusiast, a poet, a man inspired and simple-minded. Be it so. I love him still, but how small for me is the place which he fills in the history of ideas!

how the importance of his personal work has diminished! how much more henceforth is his religion to be sustained by the accidents of human events than by any of those great historical necessities which we agree, and are a little compelled, to call providential.

"Let us accept the true, even although it takes us by surprise and alters our point of view. Verily, then, here is Jesus demolished! So much the worse for him; for us, perhaps, so much the better! His religion has arrived at the point of doing at least as much evil as it had done good, and since—whether it be M. Renan's opinion or not—I am to-day persuaded that it can only do evil, I think that M. Renan's book is the most useful that he could have written."

A few lines after this estimate of the Life of Jesus, George Sand proceeds:—"Have you read the five or six pages which M. Renan contributed last month to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*? I like that article better than anything which he has written hitherto. It is great, great! I see, indeed, something to find fault with in certain of its details; but it is so great that I resist little and admire much." The piece which thus raised George Sand's enthusiasm is a letter to Renan's old friend, Marcellin Berthelot, entitled "The Natural Sciences and the Historical Sciences," republished in *Dialogues et Fragments Philosophiques* (1876). It is a stupendous illustration of Renan's favourite doctrine, that the universe does not exist in all its plenitude, but is ever growing, ever becoming, developing itself from one unknowable in the direction of another. Carrying himself in thought backward through innumerable æons, he arrives at a point in the illimitable past when the All was a universe of atoms obeying only the laws of mechanics, but containing the germ of all that was to follow. The atoms become molecules, the molecules are

aggregated into suns, the suns throw off planets, each of them having an evolution of its own. Among them is our Mother Earth, something of the story of which is told by geology and palæontology until man arrives. "Two elements, time and the tendency to progress, explain the universe. *Mens agitat molem. . . . Spiritus intus alit.*" Given time and progress, what may mankind not attain to, when science, a child of yesterday, shall have grown with the growth of millions of æons? The universe will differ as much from the world which is now, as the world which is now differs from that of the time when neither sun nor earth existed. There will be something which will be to the actual consciousness of man what the actual consciousness of man is to the primeval atom. Knowledge is power. Who knows whether science, infinitely developed, will not bring with it infinite power? A single power will then govern the world; that power will be science, will be the mind.

"The triumph of mind is the true Kingdom of God. There will be then a resurrection of us men of the idea who have contributed to that end. Religion will have been found to be true. Virtue will be explained. Then will be understood the meaning of that strange instinct which impelled man, without any thought of self-interest and reward, to renunciation, to self-sacrifice. The belief in a God the Father will be justified. Our little endeavour to forward the reign of the Good and the True will be a stone hidden away in the foundations of the everlasting temple, but we shall have none the less contributed to the Divine work. Our life will have been a part of the infinite life, in which we shall have a place marked out for us through all eternity."

Some months after the appearance of these soaring speculations Renan contributed to the *Revue des Deux*

Mondes an essay of quite a practical kind on the history and future of the Higher Education in France ("L'Instruction Supérieure en France, son Histoire et son Avenir"). Renan maintained that the professorial system in the Faculties of Letters and Science in the University of France, fostered a merely superficial knowledge. The doors of the lecture-room were thrown open to the public, who flocked to hear a Cousin, a Guizot, a Villemain, a Michelet. But what could these distinguished men give a numerous and miscellaneous audience but brilliant generalities? Such popular prelections did not develop a love of study, and their success encouraged young men to aim at oratorical skill and neglect research. Without saying a word on his own grievance, Renan pleaded for the strengthening of the Collège de France, for an increase of the number of professors of high and special subjects presiding over zealous students who would form schools of research, and might be encouraged by scholarships to prosecute for terms of years studies which are in a worldly sense unproductive. The French were of Celtic origin, yet the Collège de France was without a chair of Celtic languages and literature, while there was not in Germany a university, not even a school of a superior kind, without a specialist who lectured on the ancient Germanic languages and literatures. In season and out of season, and however occupied otherwise, Renan throughout life advocated the improvement of the higher education of his country on the lines pointed out, and the much that has been done in that direction is largely due to his appeals and to his efforts.

CHAPTER VII.

[1864-69.]

THE great success of his Life of Jesus encouraged Renan to proceed energetically with the Origins of Christianity, the second volume of which was to be devoted to the Apostles. Before writing the biography of the Founder of Christianity, Renan had been enabled by his mission to Phœnicia to visit the localities consecrated by the presence of Jesus. It was desirable that before writing the history of the Apostles he should inspect the localities out of Palestine which had received missionary visits from one or two of them, and, above all, St. Paul; and this object Renan could now effect without the aid of the Imperial Government. The Life of Jesus was issued in 1863; towards the close of 1864 Renan set out for the East. The results of this topographical pilgrimage are agreeably visible in many a picturesque sketch of Eastern scenery, European and Asiatic, many a delineation of the places and people as known to St. Paul, and often described as they are now or were when Renan visited them—an interesting contrast.

Three years after the publication of the Life of Jesus appeared, in 1866, "The Apostles" (Les Apôtres), as the second volume of the *Origines du Christianisme.* Another three years, and, in 1869, the third volume of the same great work, "St. Paul," was given to the world. The contents of these two volumes are so closely connected that they may be fitly included in the same survey. In the preface to "The Apostles," Renan referred, with great calmness and dignity, to the chief criticisms on the Life of Jesus. One of these was the conjectural character of many of its statements. To this Renan replied that in such a case, where only the truth of the general effect is certain, and where, in consequence of the often legendary character of the documents, much is doubtful, hypothesis cannot be dispensed with. You cannot reproduce the reality, but you can do your best to approximate to it. The writer's conscience may be at rest when he has presented as certain that which is certain, as probable that which is probable, as possible that which is possible.

To the reproach, clothed often in most unseemly language, that in writing his Life of Jesus he had a polemical object—for instance, that he wished to destroy the faith of the orthodox believer, Renan replies with equal calmness and dignity, and even with a touch of pathos. No such intention was his. He had received a number of letters asking him what was his intention, what was his aim. His answer is "the same as that of any other historian," to discover the truth, and to make it live; to work at making the great events of the past known as accurately as possible, and exhibit them in a manner worthy of them. To shake any one's faith was far from him.

On the contrary, he sees regretfully the danger which lurks in the promulgation of some truths, though the duty to promulgate them is imperative. What is good for those whose nobleness preserves them from moral danger, might, in its application, be hurtful to the ignoble.

"Great things are the fruit only of rigidly definite ideas, for the human capacity is limited, and a man absolutely without prejudice would be powerless. Let us enjoy the freedom of the sons of God, but let us guard against complicity in that diminution of virtue by which society would be threatened if it came to pass that Christianity were weakened. What should we be without it? Who will replace such great schools of earnestness and reverence as St. Sulpice, such a ministration of self-devotedness as that of the Sisters of Charity? Can we be otherwise than alarmed by the aridity of heart and by the littleness which are invading the world? Our disagreement with those who believe in positive religions is, after all, exclusively scientific. In heart we are with them. We have only one enemy, and he is theirs also, vulgar materialism, the baseness of the selfish man. . . . Those who cling to their faith as to a treasure have a very simple method of defending it. It is to pay no heed to books written in a spirit different from their own. The timorous do better not to read them."

By one criticism, emanating from his friends as well as from his enemies, Renan was consciously or unconsciously influenced, and the influence is traceable throughout the volumes of the Origins published subsequently to the Life of Jesus. This was in his treatment of the miraculous. Always and everywhere Renan continues to reject the miracle as a historical fact, but he never again identifies it with a pious fraud, or treats it as a phenomenon due to conscious imposture. At the very threshold of his book on the Apostles he is confronted by a mass of miraculous matter connecting

itself with the resurrection, and the subsequent appearances of Jesus to his disciples. Renan explains it all as a hallucination, of a kind frequent in ancient and modern times, a hallucination which hardened into a sort of genuine belief. Without a belief in the resurrection Christianity would have died in its cradle. The greatest religion that the world has seen was based, according to Renan, on a hallucination of the Magdalene, one fruitful of a series of hallucinations. "But," he says, "the material incidents which led to a belief in the resurrection were not the genuine cause of the resurrection. It was love which made Jesus rise again. The love for him was so potent that a little accident sufficed to build the edifice of the universal faith."

Renan's chief materials for his work on the Apostles, and the Apostle of the Gentiles who was added to them, are of course the Acts of the Apostles and the genuine Epistles of St. Paul. As regards the Acts, the position of Renan towards the advanced and destructive criticism of the Germans is as usual a conservative one. Renan thinks that the author of the Acts is also the author of the third gospel, the same Luke who was the disciple and companion of St. Paul. The first twelve chapters of the Acts are full of legendary matter. The remaining sixteen, narrating the missionary travels of St. Paul, especially those in which the author describes himself as an eye-witness, are of very considerable historical value. But much even of this latter portion must be read with caution, since on such most important points as the relations between the Apostles at Jerusalem and the Apostle of the Gentiles, Luke is

in flagrant disagreement with the infinitely more trustworthy statements of St. Paul himself in the Epistle to the Galatians. This Renan attributes to Luke's desire to play the part of a reconciler in the early history of the Christian Church, and to minimise, or indeed to ignore, the controversy between St. Paul and the, so to speak, official Apostles. For the rest, Renan considers most of the speeches reported in the Acts to have been manufactured by Luke. The inferior character of the manufactured article leads Renan to estimate highly the genuineness of the speeches of Jesus reported in the third Gospel, as very far above the powers of invention displayed by Luke in the Acts.

The Apostles have bid farewell to Galilee, and have settled at Jerusalem. Peter and John are the most active of them. Among them is James, the so-called brother, but more probably the cousin-german of Jesus, and destined to become, if he was not so already, the head of the mother church of Jerusalem. All of them frequent the Temple, and practise the Judaic observances, differing apparently from ordinary Jews only in the belief that Jesus was the Messiah, and had been raised from the dead. With the cessation of the supposed appearances of Jesus after death, they acquired a belief in the Holy Ghost as inspiring them: hence their alleged power of working miracles, their prophesyings, speaking with tongues, and other abnormal manifestations of enthusiasm, paralleled, Renan points out, among Christians in modern times. A common love for their Master, and a belief in his speedy re-appearance to judge the world, united them in the closest bonds,

and formed them into a community apart, inhabiting a quarter of their own and having all things in common. Whatever their possessions, these were sold, and the money-proceeds were deposited in a fund, the largest contributors to which drew no more from it than the smallest. They took their meals together, and attached to them the mystical meaning which Jesus had given to the breaking of bread and the drinking from the cup. Together they prayed, together they had ecstatic movements and inspirations from above. No dogmatic disputes disturbed their harmony. Joy was in all their hearts, and Renan remarks that in no literature is the word "joy" so often repeated as in that of the New Testament. "The remembrance of these two or three first years remained as that of an earthly paradise, which Christianity will thenceforward dream of aiming to restore, and to which it will in vain endeavour to return. Who in point of fact does not see that such an organisation could be applicable only to a very small church? But later the monastic life will for its own behoof resume that primitive ideal which the Church Universal will hardly dream of realising."

The spectacle of this pious and happy community, aided by a vague propagandism, soon gained it adherents beyond the little Galilean group which was the nucleus of a church at Jerusalem. Some of these converts were "Hebrews," Jews of Palestine, speaking Syro-Chaldaic, the language of Jesus and the Apostles, and reading the Hebrew Old Testament. But the majority of the adherents were Hellenistic Jews and proselytes who flocked to Jerusalem from the Jewish communities

scattered throughout the Roman Empire. They were of two classes, one consisting of Jews by race, the other of Gentile proselytes more or less affiliated to Judaism. All of them spoke Greek, and used the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. Through contact with these Hellenistic converts the Apostles and Galilean disciples, Renan supposes, gained a knowledge of Greek, which was indispensable to Christian missionaries operating beyond the confines of Palestine. Chief among the earliest converts to Christianity were the proto-martyr Stephen, Barnabas the Cypriote, and his cousin John Mark, probably the author of the second gospel.

The administration of the affairs of the Christian community was wholly in the hands of the Apostles when something happened that led to the first systematic organisation known to the early church. The majority of its members being no longer Galileans, but consisting of Hellenistic Jews and proselytes, these complained that their widows were not fairly treated in the distribution of the funds or goods of the community. The Apostles accordingly resolved to delegate this part of their administrative functions to seven just men, chosen chiefly from among the Hellenists; and the earliest of Christian orders after the Apostolate was constituted in the form of the Diaconate. Deaconesses perhaps belong to a later era, but Renan surmises that they were appointed "very early" in the history of the Church. On the Diaconate, and this development of it, Renan is enthusiastic and eloquent:—

"Admirable is the tact which in all this matter guided the primitive church. With a knowledge which was profound because it came from

the heart, these good and simple-minded men laid the foundations of what is pre-eminently great in Christianity—Charity. Nothing had furnished them with models for such institutions. A vast ministering organisation of beneficence and of mutual assistance, for which the two sexes contributed their different qualities and combined their efforts to alleviate human misery, this is the holy creation which issued from the labours of these two or three years. They were the most fruitful in the history of Christianity. . . . The institutions which are regarded as a later fruit of Christianity—associations of women, Béguines, sisters of charity, were among its first creations, the principle of its strength, the most perfect expression of its genius—in particular, the admirable idea of consecrating by bestowing a kind of religious character on, and by subjecting to a regular discipline, women who are not in the bonds of matrimony. The word 'widow' became the synonym of a religious person devoted to God, and consequently of a deaconess. In those countries where the wife of four-and-twenty is already faded, and there is no middle term between the child and the old woman, it was as if a new life were created for that half of human kind which is the most capable of devotedness."

The members of the Church of Jerusalem in the course of two or three years were some thousands in number. Its peace was disturbed by the Jewish persecution of the Christians, which was tolerated rather than encouraged by the Roman authorities, and which produced the martyrdom of Stephen, conspicuous among his murderers being Saul of Tarsus. This persecution dispersed throughout Palestine the Christians of Jerusalem, where, however, the Apostles courageously remained. At the same time the cenobitic life of the Jerusalem church came, Renan thinks, to an end. The dispersion of all but the apostolic members of the Church led to missionary effort. Philip evangelised Samaria, whither he was followed by Peter and John. But this propa-

gandism was trifling in its area and results compared with that which was to flow from the sudden and startling conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

In the chapter devoted to that cardinal fact in the history of the Christian Church, the conversion of St. Paul, Renan displays to the utmost his imaginative and descriptive powers. Paul, as he called himself when he became the Apostle of the Gentiles, was wending his way to wreak his wrath on the Christians of Damascus. But doubts as to the righteousness of his persecuting mission traversed his mind. Was it not possible that after all he was thwarting the purpose of God? Perhaps he bethought him of the wise and benignant warning against maltreating the apostles which his teacher Gamaliel had given to the Sanhedrim (Acts v. 38, 39). He had heard of the appearances of Jesus after death, and may have believed in them, since in times and countries when and where the marvellous is accepted, stories of miracles affect even the opponents of the religion of those who work the miracles; thus the Mohammedans of to-day are afraid of the miracles of Elijah, and, like the Christians, ask for miraculous cures from St. George and St. Anthony. Paul may have fancied that he beheld the mild countenance of the Master looking at him with an air of pity and tender reproach. He was nearing Damascus, and saw before him the houses, some of which were tenanted by his intended victims. He had been journeying for eight days, apparently on foot, and fatigue, always greatest when the journey is ending, overpowered him. In those regions attacks of fever, accompanied by delirium, are sudden, and when the attack is over the

sufferer retains the impression of a profound gloom traversed by flashes of lightning which illuminate images traced on a background of black. Renan had such an attack at Byblos, and but for his modern enlightenment might have taken his hallucinations for visions. After the same attack he forgot entirely all that had happened on the day before that on which he lost consciousness. Thus perhaps St. Paul, suddenly struck to the ground in a fit of physical exhaustion, combined with mental agony, may have forgotten what preceded the vision which he believed that he saw and the words which he believed that he heard. I spare the reader others of the perhapses with which Renan seeks to explain the incident which in its results changed the face of the world. He himself says, "in such cases the external fact matters little. The true cause of St. Paul's conversion was his remorse on approaching the town where he was about to fill the measure of his misdeeds."

Having preached his new religion with as much energy as he had thrown into his persecution of its adherents, Paul after three years visited Jerusalem for the first time since he left it on his abortive mission to Damascus. This sojourn at Jerusalem was brief. He was for a fortnight the guest of Peter; James was the only other apostle with whom he conferred; and the disciples looked askance at him as a former persecutor. Renan lays great stress on the conduct of Barnabas to him now and hereafter. Barnabas smoothed the way for friendly commune between Paul and the suspicious disciples at Jerusalem. "By this act showing wisdom and penetration, Barnabas was of the very highest service to

Christianity. It was he who divined Paul; it is to him that the Church owes the most extraordinary of its founders." Paul was at Tarsus when Barnabas sought him out and brought him to Antioch (of which as it was then Renan gives a brilliant description), where the first great fusion between Jew and Gentile in the Church took place, and where therefore, most appropriately, the followers of Jesus were first called Christians. It was at Antioch that Paul and Barnabas resolved on the earliest of those missions to the Gentile as well as Jew which were the starting-point in the conversion of the world to Christianity. Antioch was then the third city of the Roman Empire, being inferior to Rome and Alexandria alone. The Church of Antioch was not only superior in numbers to the Church of Jerusalem, but as that into which Gentiles were first admitted on a large scale, setting an example elsewhere, it exerted a dominant influence on the development of the new religion. The control of the Churches remained nominally with the mostly Judaising apostles at Jerusalem, and notably with James, whom Renan regards as little else than a Pharisee. But, in spite of their opposition, Paul carried out the nobler and more comprehensive policy, the failure of which would have prevented the development of Christianity into a universal religion, and have made it a mere appendix to Judaism. In two of the concluding chapters of the volume on the Apostles, Renan points out how circumstances favoured the missionary enterprises undertaken by Paul and Barnabas. The Roman Empire, which was the one arena of their operations, had on the whole destroyed those national institutions

of the subject provinces which would have constituted a formidable obstacle to the spread of Christianity among the Gentiles. The Jewish settlements, numerous throughout the Empire, were so many fields in which the Christian missionaries could sow the seed of the new religion, rarely without some success. Among the mass of Gentiles, monotheism and a system of practical ethics, as embodied in Judaism, were proving so much more attractive than the old immoral polytheism, that Judaism was making converts, even among the higher classes of Rome itself. All that was good in Judaism was offered by Christianity, with a great deal more which Judaism could not offer; and for the reception of Christianity as preached by Paul there was not needed that preliminary rite which was a stumbling-block to many otherwise disposed to embrace the Jewish monotheism.

The volume on St. Paul, the sequel to The Apostles, takes up his story at the departure with Barnabas from Antioch to enter on the first of his great missionary journeys. Renan dedicated the volume to his wife, who had accompanied him during his journeys in the footsteps of the Apostle of the Gentiles. "Together we have seen," he wrote, "Ephesus and Antioch, Philippi and Thessalonica, Athens and Corinth, Colossi and Laodicea. Never on those difficult and dangerous routes did I hear thee murmur; never in our journeyings any more than in the free pursuit of truth didst thou say to me 'halt!'" This personal exploration of the regions and places visited by St. Paul gives a peculiar charm to Renan's narrative of the self-appointed Apostle's three

missionary journeys, a narrative expanded from the Acts, and from indications in the epistles of Paul himself. But deeply interesting as is Renan's narrative, illuminating as it does the career of the Apostle by innumerable descriptive touches, and by side-lights projected from a vast erudition on the intellectual, moral, social, and political condition of the populations among whom Paul laboured, there is, as Renan views it, something still more important in Paul's missionary career than its exhibition of boundless energy and zeal, than the trials and sufferings which he bore not only patiently but joyfully, than the frequent romance of the incidents, than the statistical results of his proselytisings. Lesser men might have founded churches. The names of the founders of the churches of Rome and Antioch themselves are unknown. The actual number of permanent converts to Christianity made by Paul is computed by Renan to have been little more than a thousand, though the seed sown by him was increased in time a thousand-fold. Following in this matter Baur, Renan seeks to impress on his readers the conviction that Paul's greatest achievement was the severance, not indeed completed in his time, but begun by him, the definite severance of Judaism from Christianity.

When Paul returned to Antioch after his first missionary journey, the peace of the flourishing church of that city was disturbed (Acts xv. 1) by "certain men which came down from Judæa," who insisted that circumcision was necessary to salvation. Paul was strenuously opposed to this narrow theory, and it was decided that the apostles and elders at Jerusalem should be consulted

on the question. Thither accordingly he proceeded with his follower, the uncircumcised Titus. Renan describes the state of things at Jerusalem in his usual animated and conjectural way, maximising, as is his wont, the contrast between the Judaising James and the anti-Judaising Paul. According to the Acts, the result was a compromise. The Judaisers made the concession that so far as Gentile converts were concerned, circumcision was not to be enjoined. So far the victory was with Paul, and for the present the Christian Church was spared a schism which might have proved fatal to it. But, according to Renan, founding on a statement in the Epistle to the Galatians (ii. 12), the old controversy broke out again at Antioch more seriously than ever, and in spite of the compromise supposed to have been agreed on. This time "certain came from James," and relighted the controversy. Before their arrival, Peter "did eat with the Gentiles," but after that arrival "he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision." "The other Jews" approved of his action, and with them even the loyal Barnabas. Of Peter on this occasion Paul says, "I withstood him to the face." With these incidents, Renan opines, there began a division, which lasted for a century, of the Christian Church into two parties, that of Paul and that of the Judaisers. Nay, more, from the whole argument of the Epistle to the Galatians, Renan draws the inference that the agents of the party of Jerusalem began, on quitting Antioch, a series of attempts to destroy the authority of Paul among the very churches which he himself had founded. Circular-letters were despatched written in the name of the apostles, warning

the faithful against Paul, and Renan goes the length of supposing it possible that the denunciatory epistle of Jude may have been one of these circular-letters! Paul, after his death, is mostly forgotten or ignored, Renan thinks, until the third century, when he becomes, and during the two succeeding centuries remains, the founder of Christian theology. Forgotten again during the Middle Ages, he revives with the Reformation and shapes the theology of Luther and Calvin.

Renan's final verdict on Paul is unsatisfactory. He is greater throughout the volume than in the closing chapter. Justice had been done to his commanding personality, to his missionary zeal, to his singular combination of independence with a readiness to make concessions when they were useful to the cause, while resolute to make none when an essential principle was at stake. It is disappointing to be told that Paul may say what he pleases, he is inferior to the other apostles. He was, we are further told, proud, rude, given to self-assertion, to believing that he was always in the right, to adhering to his own opinion, and so on. But had he been other than he was, had he been one of those meek and saintly persons like St. Francis of Assisi and the author of the *Imitation of Christ*, whom Renan actually sets above him, he would have succumbed to the apostles who had been the personal followers of Jesus, he would not have resisted their Judaising tendencies, he would not have "withstood" Peter "to the face," he would not, as Renan felicitously says, have "torn to pieces the strangling swaddling-clothes of infant Christianity, and proclaimed it to be no mere reform of Judaism, but to be

what it was, a religion complete in itself, existing by itself." Paul had not, like the official apostles, ever heard the words of the Master, but what is there in the epistles of Peter, or John, or James, or Jude, so Christ-like as that chapter on charity in the first epistle to the Corinthians, which Renan admits to be, "in the whole literature of Christianity, the only page that can be compared to the sayings of Jesus."

CHAPTER VIII.

[1869-71.]

THE publication of the volume on St. Paul was preceded by that of "Questions of the Time" (*Questions Contemporaines*), a collection of contributions to various periodicals, some of the most important of which have been already referred to. In the preface to the volume Renan did what he had never or seldom done before—he spoke his mind on the political state of France. A crisis was evidently approaching. The policy of the Emperor, Napoleon III., was changing again, and for the worse. Acting for a time against the wishes of the adventurers who were his coadjutors in the *coup d'état* and his councillors afterwards, the Emperor had again succumbed to their influence and to that of the priesthood. The party which in 1868 had the ear of the Emperor, is described and censured by Renan in his preface, as that which insisted on the Pope's unqualified retention of the temporal power, which wished to undermine the new kingdom of Italy, and, making itself still more dangerous, insisted that France ought to have had some territorial compensation for her inertia after Sadowa and

her connivance at the formation of a North German confederation under the hegemony of Prussia. The retrogressive tendencies of the Imperial policy, especially on the Papal question, of course increased the exasperation of the French Liberals at the personal government of Napoleon III. and the triumph of the most reactionary of his supporters. When there came the general election of May 1869, the Liberals made a dead-lift effort to increase the number, then very small, of their representatives in the Corps Législatif.

Renan had no love for the Empire, but he believed that it could not be overturned without a revolution, and, by two decades older than when he wrote *L'Avenir de la Science*, of revolutions, in his view necessary evils at the best, he thought that France had had enough. The Empire had at least lasted nearly twenty years, and appeared to have taken root. If its personal government could be transformed into a constitutional one, Renan was ready to support it. He had great hopes, moreover, of the advanced Liberalism of Prince Napoleon, with whom his intimacy had been steadily growing, and who much admired him. Indeed, it was a standing reproach of the clerical journals against the Prince that for a series of years he was Renan's fellow-guest at an annual dinner given by Sainte-Beuve on Good Friday, when the company feasted instead of fasting! Renan shared in the general excitement created by the political situation, and became a candidate for the electoral district, chiefly rural, of Seine-et-Marne, a department with which he had no local connection beyond having sometimes spent in it a holiday. Canvassing and addressing

meetings formed a new sphere of action for the refined and rather secluded scholar, who while immersed in the bustle of electioneering was correcting the proofs of his volume on St. Paul. In the forefront of his electoral manifesto, placarded on the walls of their villages, the electors read the emphatic words—"No Revolution! No War! Progress! Liberty!" which show that he feared the results producible by the appeals of the Chauvinists of the time—and they were to be found out of as well as in the ranks of the Imperialists—to the national susceptibilities of the French and their jealousy of the new strength of their old enemies the Prussians. It was doubtless a fear of this kind which led him to say sadly, in the dedication of St. Paul to his wife:—"In our youth we have seen melancholy days, and I fear that long before we die destiny will show us more of them. Several enormous errors are dragging our country to the abyss, and those who are warned against them reply with a smile." Instead of advocating the revolution aimed at by the Republican party, Renan asked for such a development of the established state of things as, without disturbance, would enable the country to carry out its will and to effect profound reforms. Instead of encouraging the Chauvinist spirit he called for a reduction of the army, for a termination of the state of armed peace, and for a shortening of the term of service (then nine years) with the colours. He declared himself opposed to distant expeditions (Mexico, Cochin-China), and ready to vote for the immediate evacuation of Rome by the French soldiers, whose bayonets supported the temporal

sovereignty of the Pope. He was for a strict parliamentary control over the Budget, and a great development of popular education. He was for liberty of the press and of association. As regarded religion, he would leave the priest master in his chapel, but without political or municipal influence, and Renan pronounced in favour of the separation of Church and State at a more convenient season. The most formidable of Renan's competitors were a Government candidate, and a Republican who was recommended to the electors by Jules Simon and Hippolyte Carnot. The seat was won by the Republican with 10,484 votes, the Government candidate coming next with 9167, and Renan last with 6886. He was twitted during the election with his court connections, which meant, I suppose, his intimacy with Prince Napoleon. His reply to the taunt was more candid than prudent: "How do you expect me to defend your interests if I systematically avoid seeing the persons who control them?" The story is told that the Emperor expressed regret to Renan for his failure, and that he replied, "If your Majesty had withdrawn your candidate, I should have succeeded."

The result of the general election was to treble the numerical strength of the Liberal opposition, and this was partly due, perhaps, to the previous mitigation by the Emperor of the severe restrictions on the liberty of the press. The Emperor began to waver, and as the year wore on he made some concessions in the direction of parliamentary modifications of his system of personal government. Renan took advantage of the opportunity to contribute to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* an article on

"Constitutional Monarchy in France" (*La Monarchie Constitutionnelle en France*), the gist of which was that he doubted whether a republic could firmly establish itself in France, that the general election of May had shown the French resolved to have done with the mere "simulacrum of parliamentary government" given them by Napoleon, and that quite possibly he would give them the reality instead of the semblance. A step in that direction was taken by the appointment of Émile Ollivier to the direction of affairs in January 1870. In April a new constitution, allowing a parliamentary initiative in legislation, was granted by the Emperor, and approved by the plébiscite of May. On the nation the result of the plébiscite had a very calming effect. The legislative body, invested with its new power of initiation, was busy with all sorts of Liberal measures, when suddenly the Empress, the hierarchy, the heads of the military party, gained a victory over the hesitating Emperor. In the July of 1870 France found herself at war with Germany, and the beginning of the end was at hand.

Some time previously in that year, in accordance with the changed spirit of the Imperial *régime*, Renan was on the point of being restored to his chair at the Collège de France. At the Easter of 1870 Sir M. E. Grant Duff says, "I took Sir John Lubbock to see him, and he said to us, 'I am going to begin my lectures as Luis de Leon did when he resumed his, after having been silenced for years by the Inquisition, with the words, 'As I was observing at our last meeting.'" But some obstacle intervened, and it was only when the

Second Empire had fallen that Renan's restoration took place. After the plébiscite, and its confirmation of the concession of something like constitutional government, so little expectation was there, even among those near the throne, of an approach to war, that Prince Napoleon started, with Renan for a companion, on a long tour to the far north. On the 19th of August, 1870, when Renan knew that all was lost, from his little country house at Sèvres he wrote to Sir M. E. Grant Duff the letter from which I translate the following sentences:—

"You knew perhaps that six weeks ago I made with Prince Napoleon a little tour in Scotland, to Aberdeen, Inverness, and Banff. I need not tell you that I thought often of you, and that on asking numbers of times I found that you were not in those latitudes. The Prince, too, was very anxious to make your acquaintance.

"What a storm, dear friend, has come on us since then! What an attack of mental alienation! What a crime! The greatest pang I ever felt in my life was when at Tromsöe," the port of Hammerfest, northernmost of European towns, "we received the dismal telegram informing us that war was certain and would be immediate. I confess that I thought the danger of war averted for years, perhaps for ever. The future of France appeared to me depressing and commonplace, but such a cataclysm I did not suspect. When he started the Prince had not a shadow of apprehension. What has happened has seemed to him, as to me, the result of a sudden attack of madness."

A few weeks more and the news of the catastrophe of Sedan reached Paris. Edmond de Goncourt describes in his well-known Journal a melancholy gathering of friends at an hotel where he and they were wont to

dine. He found Renan alone (the approach of the German army to besiege Paris had driven him from Sèvres), reading a newspaper and making gestures of despair. Others of the party arrive, Berthelot among them, and nothing is talked of but the great catastrophe, the impossibility of resistance, the incapacity of the new Republican Government of National Defence, the alleged cruelties of the Prussian victors. Some one ascribed the defeats suffered by the French to the use of arms of precision as not suited to the French temperament. To fire and then employ the bayonet was needful for the French soldier, otherwise he was paralysed. To be made a machine did not suit him. Hence the superiority of the Prussians. Whereupon Renan took up his parable and spoke of the superior intelligence and work of the Germans in all the departments which he had studied. It was not surprising that in the art of war, which, after all, is an inferior but complicated art, they should have always attained superiority. "Yes, Messieurs," he concluded, "the Germans are a superior race." "Oh, oh!" exclaimed the rest of the party in protest. "Yes, much superior to us," Renan rejoined with animation. "Catholicism cretinises the individual. Education by the Jesuits or by the Brethren of the École Chrétienne checks and represses all virtue of the highest kind, while Protestantism develops it." At last Goncourt himself exclaims, "It is all over then. Nothing remains for us but to educate a generation for vengeance." "No, no," cried Renan, rising from the table, with his face flushed, "not vengeance,—perish France, perish the Fatherland. There is above both

the Kingdom of Duty, of Reason." He was interrupted by a shout from the whole table, "There is nothing above the Fatherland." Goncourt then describes Renan as pacing round the table, waving his arms, reciting in a loud voice fragments of Scripture, and declaring that everything was to be found there.

Some ten years afterwards Renan declared publicly and emphatically, but in general terms, that Goncourt's reports (for there are several) of his prandial and post-prandial talk are not to be trusted. In his perfectly natural and legitimate indignation at the practice of printing during the life-time of the speakers their free-and-easy conversations at the dinner-table, he added some strong and contemptuous language respecting the delinquent. But, to say the truth, it is clear that in reporting Renan's conversations in the company of their common friends, Goncourt is often satisfactorily accurate. The proof is that he reports thoughts as expressed, and phrases as used by Renan which years afterwards made their reappearance in Renan's writings. In the words attributed above to Renan, except the "Perish France, perish the Fatherland," there is really nothing that Renan did not say subsequently in print. Goncourt had no grudge against Renan, though occasionally showing signs of impatience with his exalted manner of expressing himself in the very mixed society of the dinner-table. While the Commune was supreme in Paris, Goncourt reports Renan as protesting, "with justice and eloquence," against the want of courage of the parliamentary representatives of Paris in not stirring a finger against the shameful rule of the Commune.

"He said that they ought to have gone about in the city, and, addressing groups, have made them offer resistance. He said that if he had been honoured by the mandate of his fellow-citizens he would not have failed in what he called a duty. I should have wished, he added, to show myself among them, carrying on my back something that would have spoken to their eyes, something that would have been a mark, a sign, a language, something like the yoke which the prophet Isaiah or Ezekiel bore upon his shoulders."[1]

How characteristic this last remark!

At the end of April, 1871, sick of the scene which Paris presented, Renan left it for Versailles. There, in deep depression of mind, he wrote the startling "Philosophical Dialogues" (*Dialogues Philosophiques*), which he did not publish until five years later. Of them more hereafter. In 1870-71 Renan was engaged in a controversy with Strauss (whom he always calls "The Master"), so that nothing might be wanting to the sorrow with which he had witnessed the war destroy all his hopes of an intellectual alliance between France and Germany in the cause of spiritual freedom and the highest culture. The author of the *Leben Jesu* had sent Renan the volume of lectures on Voltaire, which Strauss read before the Princess Alice of England and Hesse and her little court. Renan, in acknowledging the reception of the book, praised it highly, and expressed his deep sorrow at the war, which boded ill for the hoped-for intellectual alliance of France and Germany. Strauss made this expression of regret the text for a long letter to Renan, written a fortnight before Sedan, but when the triumph of the German arms was virtually achieved.

[1] See Jeremiah xxviii. 10.

Nothing more friendly to Renan personally than the tone of the letter, but nothing more disagreeable to Renan as a Frenchman than its tenor. Strauss sketched the history of the claim of France to the primacy of Europe from the time of Louis XIV. onwards. To maintain its political primacy France, under its successive rulers down to Napoleon III., had endeavoured to weaken Germany, to keep it disunited, and until the time of Frederick the Great the old German Empire had permitted France to annex slices of German territory. The primacy of France was now destroyed by the overwhelming victory of Germany. The war had been wantonly begun by France, and to defend itself against future attacks of the kind, Germany, reunited, would take back the German provinces filched from her by France. The French had many excellent qualities, but their great fault, a thirst for glory, and for domineering over other nations, had been fostered by circumstances, and especially by the two Napoleons. Guarantees against French ambition must be exacted. Then and only then could there be any talk of a friendly union between France and Germany for the promotion of culture and the arts of peace.

In due course (the siege of Paris had just begun) Renan replied. While admitting that France had been to blame in going to war, which he attributed to the Emperor, not to the nation, he laid stress on the assent of Napoleon III. to the results of the Prusso-Austrian war of 1866, as constituting a claim to more consideration than he had received from Prussia. The loss which the world would sustain by the annihilation

of France, and the gain to the world from a European intervention to prevent her dismemberment, were insisted on. As one biographer of Jesus writing to another, Renan concluded with a little homily on the forgiveness of injuries enjoined in the Gospel. "That which admits to Valhalla excludes from the kingdom of God. Have you remarked that neither in the beatitudes, nor in the Sermon on the Mount, nor in the Gospels, is there a word giving a place to military virtues among those which gain the kingdom of God?"

Strauss took up his pen and wrote a rejoinder, still personally friendly in tone, but in tenor even more drastic than his former letter. Whatever the folly of their governors, the French themselves were lovers of peace, were they? How came it then that Renan's pacific countrymen had been claiming for fifty years the left bank of the Rhine, and that after Sadowa, which cost them not a soldier nor an inch of territory, they demanded compensation? As to the annihilation of France, which Renan predicted as the result of her loss of Alsace and Lorraine, Strauss replied that they were German provinces which had been taken from Germany, and that if Germany had survived the loss of them so surely might France. To Renan's proposal of a Congress to settle the terms of peace, Strauss opposed recollections of the Congress of Vienna, which imposed on Prussia fetters not broken by her until 1866.

Renan's second reply to Strauss is a very clever and suggestive lecture on the danger of pushing too far the application of the principle of nationalities, involved in Strauss's argument. That principle is only a hundred

years old. In the days of yore the transfer of a province from one sovereign to another was a mere transfer of soil, the inhabitants were for the most part indifferent to the change. It is not so now. One nation has no right to keep in subjection to it another nation against that other nation's will. Hence, Renan says, French Liberals were for the Venetians and the Lombards, against Austria; for Bohemia and Hungary against the centralisation of Vienna, for Poland against Russia, for the Greeks and Slavs of Turkey against the Turks. But the claim of Germany to annex, say Alsace, is not founded on any wish of the inhabitants to be separated from France; on the contrary, they are powerfully attached to France. Alsace is to be annexed to Germany because it is German by language and race. If a country is to be dismembered on such a pretext, where is such a policy to end? Let Germany look to it. Prussia has never assimilated Posen as France has assimilated Alsace. Renan threatens Germany with the Pan-Slavic movement, which is a natural accompaniment of the Germanic movement. France might have been Germany's ally against Pan-Slavism; but henceforth, in consequence of the policy of Prussian statesmen, France will for long have no other objective than the re-conquest of her lost provinces. The policy forced on her will be to foment the ever-growing hatred of the Slavs for the Germans, to encourage Pan-Slavism, and to minister unreservedly to Russian ambition,—a prophecy of Renan's which has since acquired a certain significance. With Renan's rejoinder the controversy closed. Renan respected Strauss too much to harbour any rancour against him. Only

the year after the termination of the controversy he prefixed an amiable introduction to a French translation of essays by Strauss.[1]

Having vindicated before the foreigner what he regarded as the rights and claims of France, Renan, with considerable courage, proceeded to address some very frank monitions to his countrymen on the errors of their past and on the necessity for amending them. In 1871, the year of the Treaty of Peace between France and Germany, Renan published "The Intellectual and Moral Reform of France" (*Réforme Intellectuelle et Morale de la France*). Its thesis was that France might become great again, and profit by her very fall. The work included an interesting sketch of French history from earlier to the latest times. For the restoration of France to her place among the nations, Renan recommends her to follow the example of her Prussian conquerors after Jena, and to

[1] The one personal reproach, and it was delicately expressed, which came from Renan's pen during the controversy, was well deserved by Strauss. He had published his correspondence with Renan, so far as it had then gone, for the benefit of German soldiers wounded in the war. In the last letter to his "illustrious master," Renan thus gently twits him in regard to that proceeding:—"Heaven preserve me from raising a quibble in connection with literary copyright! Moreover, the act to which you may have made me contribute is an act of humanity, and if my poor prose has succeeded in procuring a few cigars to those who plundered my little house at Sèvres, I thank you for having furnished me with an opportunity for making my conduct conform to some of those precepts of Jesus which I take to be the most authentic. But certainly if you had allowed me to publish a product of your pen, never, oh never, should I have thought of issuing an edition of it for the benefit of our Hôtel des Invalides"—the Chelsea Hospital of Paris.

think of nothing but internal re-organisation and reform. There must be, to begin with, universal military service as in Germany. Prussia, moreover, owed her triumph also to her king and to her aristocracy. Renan dreamt of the re-establishment of royalty in France, of a young king, earnest and austere, supported by a patriotic aristocracy, and summoning to his councils men devoted to the work of reform. Renan's dream was not destined to be realised, but a French noblesse did in some measure survive, and at one time it seemed as if royalty might have been restored in France but for the fanatic obstinacy of the Count de Chambord, though the rule of Henri Cinq, founded on divine right and leaning on the Roman Catholic Church, would surely have been very little relished by Renan. Universal suffrage he distrusted thoroughly; it had given France Napoleon III. and all the mischiefs that followed from his rule, yet it could not be revoked. To improve its operation Renan recommended a system of double election. This would give 80,000 electors, to be divided into electoral colleges, one for each department. Their members were to be chosen for fifteen or twenty years, which would ensure stability, and as they would be the flower of the electoral population, the local aristocracy, the local notables, their probity could be relied on. Then there was to be a second chamber, of whom thirty members out of three hundred and sixty were to be survivors of ancient families, after a historical and critical investigation of their pedigrees, and their seats were to be hereditary. The others, members only for life, were to be elected partly by the departmental councils-general (a still existing institution some-

what analogous to our County Councils), fifty by the head of the State, the upper house would itself elect thirty. The hundred and twenty or thirty remaining members would represent the great interests and organisations of the country. The army and navy would send marshals and admirals; the magistracy, the teaching bodies, the ministers of religion would send their heads. Each class of the Institute, each industrial corporation, each Chamber of Commerce would contribute a member. So would each great town with more than a population of 100,000, Paris having four or five. Such an Upper Chamber, Renan opined, would represent whatever in the State possessed individuality; it would be a "body truly conservative of all rights and of all liberties." "Two bodies thus formed would contribute to Liberal progress and not to revolution." In consideration of certain peculiarities of the French character, as he politely phrased it, Renan even went so far as to propose the non-publication of parliamentary debates, which would avert prolixity and declamation, and what we call "Buncombe" oratory. If France was to reform itself and prepare for *revanche*, it should not waste its strength in parliamentary contests. "Prussia would not have effected its regeneration after Jena if it had adopted the practice of parliamentary life. It went through forty years of silence, which contributed in a marvellous degree to temper the character of the nation"—quite a Carlylean deliverance! On the other hand, with a Parliament dumb, so far as the outer world was concerned, Renan allowed the utmost liberty to the press, but was doubtful of extending it to the clubs.

One of the most singular passages in Renan's disquisition is that in which he pleads for extensive colonisation of a purely military kind. After his experience of the Commune he was no longer, as in the days of his parliamentary candidature, opposed to "distant expeditions." Men who created disturbances at home could be both usefully and congenially employed abroad. "A nation which does not colonise is irrevocably doomed to socialism, to the war of rich and poor." The spectacle of civilised nations conquering each other is horrible, but the regeneration of inferior by superior races is "in the providential order of humanity." The man of the people is in France much more of a fighter than an artisan. Rather than work he fights, behind barricades or otherwise. Decant, Renan says with the utmost gravity, this "devouring activity" of the French *ouvrier* into countries which, like China, call for foreign conquest; a curious monition when viewed in the light of contemporary events. Nature has made the Chinese a race of workmen, gifting them with wonderful manual dexterity, but leaving them without a sense of honour. "Give them a just government and they will be satisfied. The European race is one of masters and soldiers; let it conquer and rule the labouring races, the Chinaman, the negro, the fellah. Every one of our revolutionists is more or less a soldier who has missed his vocation, a being intended for a heroic life, and one whom you set to work in an occupation contrary to his race, a bad workman, too good a soldier. Now, the kind of life which drives our workers to revolt is happiness to a Chinaman, to a fellah, who are not in the least military."

This plan for the cure or prevention of socialism possessed, at the time when it was broached, a certain audacious originality. Whether consciously or not, his countrymen have since then been busily putting in practice Renan's recommendation.

CHAPTER IX.

[1871-78.]

FOUR years elapsed between the publication of *St. Paul* and, in 1873, that of *L'Antéchrist* (The Antichrist), the fourth volume of the *Origines*. Renan prepared himself for its composition by a journey to Rome, and an exploration of such of the localities of the Eternal City as were associated with its early Christian Church, the persecution of which by Nero, the Antichrist, contributed largely to the production of the Apocalypse ascribed to St. John. Renan received an enthusiastic welcome from his friends and admirers in Rome. Such a reception given to the author of the *Vie de Jésus* in the capital of Roman Catholic Christendom, so scandalised the faithful and irritated the Pope, that the Holy Father issued an allocution in which Renan was denounced as "the European blasphemer!"

Nowhere in Renan's writings more than in *L'Antéchrist* is there a greater exhibition of his power as a dramatic historian and a vivid portrait-painter, and of his singular skill in seizing in the huge mass of literature, even though often apocryphal, to be read and ransacked, whatever could give life and colour to his narrative.

With the opening of the volume St. Paul reappears, a captive at Rome. While still harassed by the rivalry and enmity of the Judeo-Christians, the great apostle is represented as preaching in his chains successfully to the Gentiles, and for a time made happy by the gifts and sympathy of the churches which he had founded far away, such, for instance, as that of Philippi. Renan even supposes him to have been joined at Rome by Peter, who then visited it for the first time, and who, though inclining to the Judaic form of Christianity so distasteful to Paul, is represented as heartily admiring the Apostle of the Gentiles and readily following in his footsteps. Renan thus rejects the tradition dear to the Roman Catholic Church that Peter's arrival in Rome preceded that of Paul by nearly twenty years, while at the same time he repudiates a favourite Protestant theory that Peter never visited Rome at all. From the social isolation which they practised, from their refusal to join in the Pagan worship, the Christians were unpopular at Rome, all the more so from the success of their propaganda. In the popular imagination they were guilty of crimes such as those which were ascribed to the unfortunate and cruelly persecuted Jews of the Middle Ages. It needed only a pretext to make the Roman Christians victims of a persecution, and three years after Paul's arrival there such a pretext was afforded by the burning of Rome. Renan accepts the tradition that if Nero was not, as is possible, the actual author of the fire, he encouraged it when it had begun, in order to gratify his insane vanity by building on the area of the conflagration a new Rome which would be called after

him, or at least to provide himself with a site for a new palace of his own. In the matter of their temples and other ancient memorials the Romans were highly conservative, and even a despotic emperor had to respect their conservatism. No law of expropriation could have cleared the spaces on which Nero dreamt of carrying out his architectural plans; the great fire of Rome did more for him in this way than any law could have done. Renan portrays with wonderful skill and vigour, as if he had borrowed for the nonce the pen of Victor Hugo, the character and career of Nero, his colossal vanity developing a preternatural imbecility and jealousy, to which ministered the cruelty of a savage and brutal inventiveness unparalleled in the history of man. Renan gives in all their horrible detail the varied atrocities of the massacre, the cunningly devised, the unutterable tortures and outrages to which the Christians of Rome, young and old, male and female, were subjected by Nero on the plea that they, the most innocent and harmless of his subjects, had been the incendiaries of Rome. Renan supposes that Peter and Paul perished in that Reign of Terror of July-August A.D. 64, and that the Apostle John, if he had accompanied his brother Peter to Rome, escaped and fled to Ephesus, where he laboured to Judaise the churches of Asia Minor.

Four years after the perpetration of his atrocious massacre Nero came to his dismal end. The monster, there is no doubt, was popular with the lower classes of Rome, principally because he had ministered to their insatiable appetite for public games and shows. This popularity encouraged belief in a report that he was not

dead, but had taken refuge with those old enemies of Rome, the Parthians, and would return at the head of an eastern army to punish his enemies. The report that their persecutor was to re-appear victorious, spread consternation among the Christians. A false Nero even established himself at Cythnos, one of the Cyclades. At Rome all was in confusion. Otho was disputing the empire with Galba. The crisis would perhaps end in the dreaded restoration of Nero. The advent of Antichrist seemed at hand. This fear, in Renan's theory, inspired the author of the oldest book (apart from the epistles) of the New Testament, and the only one, without exception, the date of which can be definitely fixed. Towards the close of January A.D. 69 was launched what is known to us as "The Revelation of St. John the Divine."

Renan gives an analysis of the Apocalypse, with long passages of it translated into felicitous French, quotations more needed in France than in England, where almost every house contains a copy of the Bible in the vernacular. His analysis is accompanied by a commentary which is generally ingenious (the identification of the Beast and his number 666 with Nero had been effected before Renan), and in which episodes of the book are elucidated by references to contemporary events, pestilences, physical portents, volcanic eruptions, and so forth. The whole spirit of the Apocalypse is Judaic, according to Renan, who sees St. Paul distinctly aimed at in such denunciations as those hurled in the second chapter against "them which say they are apostles but are not," "which say they are Jews and are not," "that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught . . . to eat things sacrificed

unto idols." As to the vexed question of the authorship, Renan thinks it "probable" that it was the work of the Apostle John, or that at least it was accepted by him, and addressed under his patronage to the churches of Asia. Renan gives, evidently from personal observation, a picturesque description of Patmos and its environment, as less suited to the composition of a work of the gloomy grandeur of the Apocalypse, than to a "delightful romance like Daphnis and Chloe, or to the pastoral poetry of a Theocritus and a Moschus."

Many pages of *L'Antéchrist* are devoted to the revolt of the Jews, with its sanguinary episodes of reciprocal massacre, and to the finale of the struggle, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. Renan's very vivid narrative of these occurrences is varied by life-like sketches of Vespasian and Titus, and by a skilful delineation of the career, and a discriminating estimate of the character, of Josephus, in which it is shown that in his narrative he often sacrifices truth to the wish to stand well with his later patrons among the conquerors of his country. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple Renan considers highly favourable to Christianity. If the Church of Jerusalem, which extorted from Paul himself concessions to Judaism, had with its heads remained grouped around the Temple, it would have continued to be the preponderant Christian organisation, to have kept up a war against the liberal and comprehensive policy of Paul, and to have claimed to exact from Christian converts the observance of the Jewish Sabbath, and the repulsive rite of circumcision. The incidents of the Jewish rebellion drove the surviving relatives of Jesus, and

the heads of the church of Jerusalem, to take refuge beyond the Jordan, and the destruction of Jerusalem prevented them from returning to it. The catastrophe which befell the Holy City made possible the severance of Christianity from Judaism. "The Temple once destroyed, the Christians think no more of it. For them Jesus will now be all in all."

The volume on the Antichrist off his hands, Renan set to work on another to be devoted largely to the early history of the Gospels. In the trying summer of 1875 his health broke down, and he resolved on a voyage for its recovery. Just then he received, and accepted, an unexpected invitation to attend a Scientific Congress at Palermo. The literary result was the charming paper, "Twenty Days in Sicily" (*Vingt jours en Sicile*), which he contributed to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Renan's quick glance took in everything, beauty and grandeur in scenery, archæological remains, ancient and mediæval, church architecture of the time of the Norman occupation, yet modelled on the style of the Mohammedan mosque, a certain unity of national character evolved out of the fusion of the most diverse races, Sicanians and Phœnicians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, French, Germans, Spaniards, Neapolitans. The people he liked, and he was not at all of the opinion of the foreign observer who, being consulted on the reforms needed to improve the country, suggested, as the one necessary, "an inundation which would reach the summit of Etna, and clear Sicily of the Sicilians." The malpractices of the Sicilians, their addiction to the vendetta, and to brigandage, Renan ascribed to bad government in general and

to a defective administration of justice in particular. He praises their good-heartedness, their enthusiasm, and above all, their intellectual quickness. At Girgenti, built on the site of the ancient Agrigentum, he found held in remarkable honour the memory of its illustrious citizen, that mysterious and mystical philosopher, Empedocles. A statue of him stands by the side of that of Victor Emmanuel. In the nomenclature of public places the name of Empedocles figures as largely as that of Garibaldi himself. Renan regards the ancient sage as having, to some extent, anticipated Newton, Darwin and Hegel, but admits that the local popularity of Empedocles is also due to his success in overthrowing the aristocracy of Agrigentum. The little harbour of Girgenti, from which Sicilian sulphur is, or was, largely exported, is called *Porto Empedocle*. Renan visited the sulphur-mines, the operations at which, like everything else in Sicily, were of primitive simplicity. He saw with pity a number of children, each with a lamp attached to his brow, being let down three or four hundred yards into the mines. Thence they brought up the raw material which was carried on asses' backs to the places where the sulphur was extracted. "What toil might be spared," he exclaims, "by a windlass and some rails!" This is, perhaps, the only philanthropic remark on a matter of industrial detail to be found in all Renan's writings.

Renan's reputation was European, and in 1877 he received and accepted another invitation to deliver at the Hague an address in connection with the movement then proceeding, under the auspices of Dutch royalty, to celebrate the bi-centenary of the death of Spinoza.

In his fine address he dwelt on the purity and simplicity of Spinoza's character, the unworldliness of the man who philosophised, not only contentedly, but cheerfully, on twopence halfpenny a day. Renan pronounced him "the first saint whom the modern philosophy of reason had produced." The Judaism which gave him birth cast him out. "It is the way with religious communions, the cradles of so much that is good. They claim to imprison for ever the life which has had a beginning in them. We hear the egg charging with ingratitude the chicken which has escaped from it. The egg at its own time was necessary. Then it becomes a hindrance: it must be broken." Parted from the synagogue, Spinoza devoted himself for twenty years to meditation on the idea of God. He saw that the infinite could not be subjected to limitations, that the Divinity is all or nothing. On Spinoza's so-called Pantheism, in which the universe is regarded as one substance, with two attributes, thought and extension, Renan touches rather lightly. The modern distaste for systems, and abstract formulas, prevents, he opines, an absolute acceptance of the propositions which, Spinoza believed, contained the secret of the universe. But, whatever his shortcomings,—he lived in an age when physiology and chemistry were in their infancy, an age in which reflection, even as developed by Descartes, was too exclusively mathematical and mechanical,—Spinoza had been pronounced by Goethe, Schelling, and Hegel, "the father of modern thought."

In the same year (1877) was issued the fifth instalment of the *Origines*, "The Gospels and the Second Christian Generation" ("Les Évangiles et la Seconde Génération

Chrétienne"). In the introduction to the *Vie de Jésus*, Renan had necessarily said something respecting the origin, characteristics, and comparative value of the Gospels. The new volume contains his matured opinion on the Synoptic Gospels, leaving his final word on the Gospel of St. John to be spoken in a subsequent sixth volume.

The heads of the Jerusalem Church who took refuge beyond the Jordan, at Pella, and in the adjacent province of Batanea, called themselves Ebionites and were strict followers of the law, differing only from ordinary Jews in that they believed Jesus to be the Messiah, and anticipated his second coming. It was among them, cherishing as they did memories of the sayings and doings of the Master, that a written Gospel first arose. This was the "Gospel according to the Hebrews," of which, much altered from its original form, and therefore rejected ultimately by the Church, only fragments survive. The Gospel of the Hebrews was written in Syro-Chaldaic, the language of its compilers and of Jesus; Renan assigns the date of its composition to A.D. 75 or thereabouts. From the Greek Gospels, which followed and supplanted it, it was distinguished by the prominence given in it to the Apostle James. But it is not likely that this Syro-Chaldaic Gospel reached the far-off Western Church. For this Church a Greek Gospel was needed, and the want was supplied by Mark, about A.D. 76. Mark had been the disciple of Peter, whom he followed, it is supposed, to Rome, and probably there he compiled his gospel, after the death of Peter, from whom he had learned much that he wrote of the sayings and doings of the Lord. Renan adheres

strongly to the view that Mark's is the oldest of the Greek gospels, and that, as an historical document, it is greatly superior to the others.

The gospel of Mark was, however, meagre in its reports of the sayings of Jesus. To supply this, its chief deficiency, the Gospel called St. Matthew's was compiled. In spite of the assertion of Papias and others that Matthew wrote a gospel in "Hebrew" (Syro-Chaldaic), and the accredited supposition that our gospel of Matthew is a Greek translation of that "Hebrew" one, Renan rejects an authorship by Matthew, and ascribes the gospel which goes by his name to an unknown compiler, whom he calls pseudo-Matthew. There were, in existence, according to Renan, collections of the sayings of Jesus, classified according to their subjects. Pseudo-Matthew took the gospel of Mark as he found it to begin with, and intercalated, in the narrative, fuller reports of the sayings of Jesus in those collections, and in the Gospel of the Hebrews. Several additions to Mark, such as the legends of the childhood of Jesus, pseudo-Matthew made probably from the Gospel of the Hebrews. When he had before him narratives of incidents more fully recorded than in Mark, he thrust them into the text of Mark, without expunging the narratives of them already existing there; hence the "doubles" so visible in pseudo-Matthew. Further, pseudo-Matthew modified, and softened, several of Mark's versions of the sayings and doings of Jesus, which, with the lapse of time, had become distasteful to the early Christians. Renan's critical acumen is nowhere more conspicuously displayed than in the passages in which he indicates the use which

the pseudo-Matthew makes of Mark and of the Gospel of the Hebrews. Of course it is the amplitude of the reports of the sayings of Jesus which renders the Gospel of the pseudo-Matthew so far superior to that of Mark, though inferior in the historical value of its narrative. Renan supposes that the gospel of the pseudo-Matthew was written in Syria after the arrival there of the Gospel of Mark, the deficiencies of which were observed, and that it was written in Greek for Greek-speaking Judeo-Christians. In order to give it an authority greater than that belonging to the name of Mark, the new gospel was ascribed to St. Matthew. Renan places about A.D. 85 the final redaction of the Gospel as we now have it "according to St. Matthew."

The Gospel of the pseudo-Matthew had not, Renan thinks, reached Rome from Syria by A.D. 95, about which time Luke is supposed to have composed, at Rome, the third gospel. Wherever Luke agrees with Matthew, Matthew agrees with Mark. Luke knew only Mark and not Matthew, whose admirable reports of the sayings of Jesus are consequently not reproduced in Luke. Luke adds much to Mark, from oral tradition and otherwise; perhaps he had before him a Greek translation of the Gospel of the Hebrews. Luke is the most literary of the evangelists. Much of his first three chapters, the pastoral episode of the shepherds and the angels, with the canticles which were to serve as the basis of a new liturgy, are the invention of his genius. Renan, with his quick eye and subtle sympathetic insight, notes in Luke two characteristics. One, which might be expected in a friend and follower of Paul, is his sympathy

with well-intentioned pagans and heretics; his is the parable of the good Samaritan. Another is his glorification of poverty, and sympathy with the lowly and with the penitent sinner: his is the parable of Lazarus and Dives. According to Matthew and Mark, both the malefactors crucified with Jesus revile him; according to Luke, one of them is penitent, and Paradise is promised him. On the other hand, Luke softens what, with the course of time, it seemed requisite to soften. The *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani* of Matthew and Mark had come to appear discordant with the growing conception of the divinity of Jesus. The despairing ejaculation, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*" becomes, in Luke, "*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*" In his estimate of the Synoptic Gospels, Renan considers the Gospel of St. Matthew the most important, from its evidently faithful and eminently ample reports of the sayings of Jesus. Indeed, all things considered, it is, in Renan's judgment, not only the most important of Christian books, but the most important book ever written. "The world has read habitually a book in which the priest is always in the wrong, in which respectable people are all hypocrites, while those in authority show themselves to be scoundrels, and all the rich are damned. The Catholic Church has prudently put on one side this, the most revolutionary and dangerous book that there is, but has not been altogether able to prevent it from bearing fruit. . . . In our own day the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew, against the Pharisees, is still the most ferocious satire on those who cover themselves with the name of Jesus, and whom, if he returned to the world, he would pursue with scourges."

With the story of the Gospels, and of the second Christian generation, is artistically yet naturally interwoven that of the contemporary Roman Empire. There are masterly sketches of the emperors of the Flavian dynasty, the aged, awkward, and parsimonious Vespasian, with his rather coarse jocularity, and his son Titus, enamoured of the Jewish Berenice and tolerant of the Jews. The Roman aristocracy looked down on these two Flavii as parvenus, and the philosophers dreamt of turning the Empire into a municipal republic; but both aristocrats and sages had reason to regret their moderate rule when Vespasian and Titus were succeeded by the last of the imperial Flavii, the diabolical Domitian, whose reign Renan compares to "a vampire gorging itself on the corpse of expiring humanity, an open war declared against all goodness." At the same time the monster played the part of a restorer of the decaying pagan worship, a pretension which enhanced the cruelty of his persecutions of the Christians. The empire breathed again with the accession of Nerva, the first of the five successive emperors by whom the Roman world was governed so wisely and so well as to reconcile the philosophers to the principate. Yet under these wise emperors the Christians suffered a permanent persecution worse than the intermittent persecutions of Nero and Domitian. From Nerva to Marcus Antoninus these great and beneficent rulers were not only conservative guardians of the pagan religions, but, for reasons of state, were more severe than their predecessors in dealing with private associations formed even for charitable and philanthropic purposes. Of such the Christian churches

naturally seemed the most dangerous, since their members kept themselves apart, performed no civic duties, refused to recognise the divinity of the emperors, and dimly threatened to become an *imperium in imperio.* Such a man as Tacitus could see nothing in Christianity but a "detestable superstition." Such a man as Pliny, when Imperial legate in Bithynia, puts to death, as a matter of course, those who are brought before him charged with being Christians and refusing to deny the charge. The great and wise Trajan approved what Pliny had done. "There is no uncertainty now," Renan says. "To be a Christian is to contravene the law, to deserve death. From Trajan onwards, Christianity is a state crime." The local authorities and the fanatical populations of the provinces acted on this presumption. "Whoso never sacrificed, or when passing before a sacred edifice did not send it a kiss of adoration, risked his life."

Many pages of Renan's volume are devoted to the birth and growth of those heresies touching the divine and human nature of Jesus, which increased and multiplied as the years rolled on, and which make much of the early history of Christianity so tedious, unedifying, and even irritating. But in the letter of Clement to the Corinthians, in the effect which it produced at the time, and the immense authority which it wielded afterwards, we see in Renan's pages the germ of what was to become the predominating authority of the bishops of Rome, an authority exercised with a practical wisdom characteristic of Rome, and which, whatever else may be said against it, was useful to the progress of Christianity

in suppressing the war of sects and parties, and substituting for innumerable little religious and discordant republics the unity given to the Christian world by a powerful ecclesiastical monarchy at Rome, with general councils for its parliaments occasionally. The time came when, of course, this despotism of Rome proved to be as maleficent as it had once been useful.

Renan's literary reputation was now so great that anything from his pen was assured of a wide-spread welcome, and the publishing house of Lévy had no reason to regret the bargain made with Renan by its deceased founder. His new volume of collected essays, Miscellanies of Travel and History (*Mélanges de Voyage et d'Histoire*), published in 1878, the year after *Les Évangiles*, contained articles, chiefly philological, of his earliest years, which he had not ventured to reprint in the *Essais de Critique et de Morale*, or in the *Essais d'Histoire Religieuse*. Travel is represented in them by the "Twenty Days in Sicily," noticed previously, and by "L'Ancienne Égypte" (Ancient Egypt), in which he gave an account of what he had seen, learned, and thought during his visit to Egypt, with Mariette for his companion and guide. The article contains an interesting parallel between Egypt and China, as both of them exhibitions of the reign of absolute mediocrity, and owing their profusion of chronicles to their use of the art of writing long before it was known to the Aryans. In an article on the Cæsars, Renan defends, *à propos* of Augustus, the patronage of genius by princes. Patronage by the people would be better, but it is only once or twice in Greece, and a little in the Italian

republics of the Middle Ages, that the people have encouraged genius. The great modern republic, the United States, lives, as far as art and pure science are concerned, on borrowings from Europe. Other articles, testifying once more to Renan's wide range of sympathy and keenness of insight, deal with the Shah Nameh of Firdusi, in which the poet of Mohammedanised Persia seems to regret the old religion of Zoroaster, the Golden Meadows of Maçoudi, full of racy anecdotes and sayings of the Abbaside caliphs (of whom the Haroun al Raschid of the *Arabian Nights* is the popular type), while in the article on Mohammedan Spain, the supposed Christian hero, the Cid, is shown to have been a mere adventurer, a *condottiere*, now fighting for Christ, now for Mohammed. There is a very agreeable sketch of Ibn Batuta, the Arab traveller of the fourteenth century, who rambles from Tangier to China, finding everywhere countrymen, for everywhere are Mohammedans, and "the Mussulman has no other country than Islam." The Mohammedan lover of travel could in those days indulge his taste for wandering very cheaply and pleasantly. Everywhere he finds his own language, and hospitality was a duty which one Mussulman owed to another. For thirty years Ibn Batuta led a delightful wandering life, and among the interesting quotations which Renan gives from his book is an account of Mecca during an affluence to it of the customary pilgrims. A volume on the Desert and the Soudan enables Renan, as its reviewer, to exhibit the customs, language, and religion of the Arabs, preserved in all their primitive purity in the Soudan, and not losing, as in great towns, their best characteristics.

Reviewing another volume on Kabylia, Renan takes great pains, in an article on "Berber Society," to sketch the strange social condition of the Kabyles of Algeria, a people descended from the Numidians of Massinissa and Jugurtha, with a language and even an alphabet of their own, neither of them Aryan or Semitic. The modern Berbers are pure democrats, without chiefs and without a military class. The tribes and villages are always at war with each other, but within the tribe and the village there is a plenitude of customs establishing a close fraternity for mutual help and the support of the poor by the community. Renan saw in the Kabyles social democracy realised, and as they have been for centuries as they are, they strengthened his favourite belief that no great polity can issue from democracy as democracy. One of the most interesting articles in the volume is an article on Joseph Victor Le Clerc, the early friend and patron of Renan, whose solid erudition and patient labour were of the old school which Renan loved.

Reference has been already made to the *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, edited by Le Clerc, with Renan's occasional assistance. Among Renan's contributions to it was a dissertation on the condition of the fine arts in France in the fourteenth century, another proof of his versatility. During some of the years of Renan's biography already surveyed, and all those still to be surveyed, proceeded the issue of the monumental work, the *Corpus Semiticarum Inscriptionum*. Renan's only contribution to it was the section containing Phœnician inscriptions, but he was the founder of the *opus magnum*, and to the end of his life he watched over its development with parental care.

CHAPTER X.

[1878-92.]

AFTER abandoning the Church and the Christian faith, Renan found himself in possession of a philosophy of life which, gradually developed, sustained him in his difficult struggle. The true, the good, and the beautiful were the new Trinity which he worshipped, and to worship them was happiness enough. It has been seen how, in the preface to his translation of the Book of Job, he declared for Duty to be performed at all hazards, without hope of reward here and hereafter. Kant's categorical imperative had never a more earnest devotee than Renan. He was not visited by that longing, so often felt by the thoughtful, for a revelation from above, dissipating all doubts, throwing celestial light on the duty and destinies of man, and annihilating the problematic in life. In the prayer which closes his remarkable essay on "The Metaphysics of the Future" (*La Métaphysique de l'Avenir*), written in 1860, he thanks his "Heavenly Father" because He "has not chosen to bestow a clear reply to our doubts, in order that faith in goodness should not remain with-

out merit, and that virtue should not be a calculation. A distinct revelation would have assimilated the noble to the vulgar soul: evidence in such a matter would have been an attack on our freedom. Thou hast desired that our faith should depend on our inward disposition." To all this Renan added in time the hope expressed in the letter to M. Berthelot, that beyond the grave there might be a purely spiritual reward for devotion to the spiritual in this life. Such was the creed which had been fruitful for him in well-being and well-doing, in noble effort not without result for the world, and in more ways than the spiritual for himself.

Suddenly a change came over the spirit of his dream, and educed from him utterances which gratified the worldly, but perplexed and pained the grave and serious among his friends. In former years Renan recognised the aim of Nature to be good, and for its realisation, however distant in the eternal future, she demanded man's strenuous co-operation. But now Renan professed to doubt whether Nature had any aim of that kind at all, whether we were not being duped to no purpose whatsoever, whether human existence was not a "poor farce" in which our part was assigned us by an unconscious artist, and which only gaiety could render agreeable. Schopenhauer's pessimism prescribed the extinction, so far as possible, of all earthly desire, and promised everlasting repose in Nirvana. Renan's pessimism led him to a very different conclusion. Gaiety and good-humour, he proclaimed, were to be cultivated by the select few who followed science and virtue, in case these should turn out to be phantoms. As to the

many, let them enjoy themselves. For them, whatever might be the fate of the Cosmos, there were what even the austere Wordsworth, extenuating the faults of poor Robert Burns, called "the primary felicities of love and wine." Time was that in almost the only indignant, not to say ill-natured composition which Renan ever penned, his paper on "The Theology of Béranger," he fell foul of the genial song-writer, and reproached him for having, with Lisette by his side and glass in hand, toasted, as it were, the God whom Renan himself sought, he says, "in trembling," and who, in Béranger's lyrics, had become "a God of grisettes and topers." But now, in a public address of his later years, Renan thus apologised to Béranger and to his God of grisettes and topers: "The Frenchman is joyous; his favourite phrases imply a feeling of the gaiety of life, and the idea that at bottom nothing is very serious, and that a little irony admits us to a knowledge of the intentions of the Eternal one. . . . Formerly I slandered the *Dieu des bonnes gens*"—Béranger's genial deity. "*Mon Dieu!* how much in the wrong I was. He is not at all a bad god, he never did any harm," etc. Renan protested even against temperance societies: why should not the poor man forget his sorrows in a bumper? though care should be taken that he gets tipsy amiably, and does not, in his cups, beat his wife. "Is Renan also among the Hedonists?" might well be the exclamation of pleasure-lovers whom he had offended by his censure of Béranger!

The *Dialogues Philosophiques*, which are among the most singular of Renan's writings, were written, as already mentioned, under most depressing influences, and lay in

his desk for five years, before they were published in 1876. Renan described them as conversations between different "lobes" of his brain, and protested that no one of the theories broached in them was to be fathered on his brain as a whole. It would not be difficult, however, to extract from the Dialogues Renan's philosophy of life and being at the time, but the proceeding is undesirable, since something will be said hereafter of the ultimate expression which he gave, not in dialogue but in monologue, to that philosophy. Suffice it to say that in the Dialogues the aim of the Cosmos was represented to be the evolution of a single organised entity, containing in its infinitude all organised beings that had existed or did exist. This, in very brief summary, was Renan's apocalypse, an apocalypse of science. The sceptical world of Paris, looking beyond the grave into nothingness or a blank futurity, hailed in the *Dialogues Philosophiques* Renan's record of his new excursion into the unknowable, just as George Sand, it will be remembered, welcomed enthusiastically the letter to M. Berthelot. Renan now resolved to give the Dialogue a strictly dramatic form, which would fit it for performance in a "philosophical theatre"—if such were ever established—and, meanwhile, would interest his legion of readers. Four contributions—to the unacted drama of France, "Caliban" (1878), the "Eau de Jouvence" (1881), "Le Prêtre de Nemi" (1886), and "L'Abbesse de Jouarre" (1886)—were the result. In the preface to "Caliban" Renan announces that philosophy has arrived at the stage of knowing that nothing can be affirmed. "Man sees clearly, at the hour which is striking,

that he will never know anything of the supreme cause of the universe, or of his own destiny. Nevertheless, he wishes to be talked to about all that." So Renan talks to him through quasi-dramatic puppets, who are the mouthpieces of various types of characters with their diverse views of life, Renanesque and anti-Renanesque. In "Caliban," Prospero has returned to his Duchy of Milan, and is experimenting in his laboratory instead of attending to affairs of state. The people murmur, Caliban heads a successful revolution, and from a drunken, brutal, mutinous savage is transformed into an astute statesman. Instead of avenging himself on Prospero, he protects his old tyrant both from the populace and the Church! "Caliban" was written at a time when the victory of the Republicans over the Reactionaries seemed assured. Renan bows to the inevitable, and in Caliban's protection of Prospero adumbrates the freedom given by democracy to science. In the "Eau de Jouvence" Prospero re-appears as the inventor of a sort of *elixir vitæ*, and is persecuted by the Church as a magician. He is protected for the sake of his elixir by a Pope, worldly and sensual, but superstitious. The drama closes with Prospero's euthanasia. As his end approaches, enter Caliban, who with his old master exchanges friendly words. "Without Caliban," Prospero assures him, "there could be no history. The grumbling of Caliban, the savage hatred which impels him to supplant his master, form the principle of movement in humanity"—Renan's political philosophy at that date. The scene of "The Priest of Nemi" is laid at Alba Longa, in the earliest

days of the legendary history of Rome. He is an enlightened priest, with a horror of shedding blood, even the blood of animals to be sacrificed to the Goddess of whose shrine he is the keeper. Consequently he is unpopular, and in the end he is assassinated, having come to the melancholy conviction that in so far as he has weakened—and it is not far—the religious prejudices of his countrymen, he has also weakened in them the moral fibre which those prejudices strengthened. The inference is obvious. The story of the Abbesse de Jouarre must not be reproduced here. In spite of, nay because of its pruriency, it was by far the most successful, commercially, of all these dramatic pieces, and went through no fewer than twenty-five editions!

In 1879, the year after the publication of *Caliban*, appeared the sixth and penultimate volume of the *Origines*, *L'Église Chrétienne* (The Christian Church). In this volume Renan speaks, on the authorship of the Gospel ascribed to St. John, the final word which he did not speak in the preceding volume, *Les Évangiles*. There he came to the conclusion that the pro-Judaic Apocalypse, in which St. John's hand or inspiration was clearly visible, could not have been written or inspired by the author of the anti-Judaic Fourth Gospel, but Renan left unanswered the question, "Who then did write it?" Renan's matured conviction is that the Fourth Gospel embodies the traditions of that mysterious personage, the Presbyter John (who was probably a disciple of the Apostle of the same name) and those of a certain Aristion, both the presbyter and

Aristion being in possession of an apostolical tradition, probably derived from St. John, respecting incidents in the life of Jesus. Renan adheres to his former statement that the Gospel ascribed to St. John contains facts in the life of Jesus which are historical, and which supplement the narratives of the Synoptics, but also that the sayings of Jesus in it are no more authentic than those placed in the mouth of Socrates by Plato. To make confusion worse confounded, Renan goes the length of granting the possible truth of the theory of some later sectaries, that Cerinthus, the known adversary of St. John, was the author of the Gospel ascribed to him! Renan rejects the Johnian authorship of the General Epistle ascribed to St. John, and supposes it launched in his name to prepare the way for the pious fraud which issued the Fourth Gospel as the work of that Apostle. Renan thinks it likely that all the three epistles ascribed to St. John are the handiwork of the Apostle's homonym, the Presbyter John. The Fourth Gospel, Renan says, introduced a new Christology. Jesus, the incarnation of the Word who was God, ceases to be human, to be a Jew, and can know neither temptation nor weakness. With the Gnostics he will become an æon, an emanation, a pure entity who made the body of Jesus merely an earthly domicile from which he escaped before the Passion. With wonderful patience as well as ability, Renan catalogues and characterises the brood of heresies which sprang out of Gnosticism, and which, ever multiplying by a sort of fission, were a danger to the Church. The chief heresiarch was Marcion, whom Renan calls great, and whose attempts, like those of other

Gnostics, to bring over to them the Church into which at first they sought and received admission, are skilfully described. Marcion's Gnosticism was distinguished by its simplicity as well as thoroughness. Jehovah, the harsh and cruel Jewish God, the Demiurgus of the world, was inferior to the supreme and beneficent God. The aim of the rigid and loveless law given by this God of the Old Testament, was to subject the other nations to his favourites the Jews, and not having succeeded, he promised to send them his son. But the supreme, beneficent God sent *his* son, in the seeming form of a man, to introduce a law of charity and to combat Jehovah. Jesus is not the Messiah promised to the Jews: he came to abolish the law and the prophets and all the work of Jehovah. Paul was his only Apostle, but even Paul's teaching, inasmuch as he acknowledged the law to have been divinely given, fell short of Marcion's. Marcion took the Gospel of Luke as the most Pauline of any, and re-fashioned it to suit his theory. In Marcion's Gospel Jesus had neither ancestors, parents, nor precursors. He was not born; birth, according to Marcion, was a stain; he did not suffer, he did not die. Everything that connected Jesus with Judaism was expunged in Marcion's gospel. To such a length did Marcion carry his detestation of the Old Testament, that when his Jesus descended into hell, and then ascended into heaven, the accursed of the Old Testament, Cain, and so forth, accompanied him, while Abel, Noah, Abraham, favourites of Jehovah, were left behind and below! Marcion, like other Gnostics, looked on matter as evil. An evil, too, was human life led on the earth

which belonged to the Demiurgus Jehovah. To propagate the species was to increase the subjects of the bad Demiurgus, and it was condemned by Marcion. The glorification of martyrdom was a prominent characteristic of Marcionism, since martyrdom liberated the Christians from life which is an evil.

Marcion had followers in greater numbers than any heresiarch before Arius. But he, and the crowd of heresiarchs who preceded and succeeded him, were banned by the Church of Rome, which combated their heresies, and these in time died out. For the organisation of the Church of Rome was being perfected, and its authority becoming supreme. It is very acutely remarked by Renan that, as the hopes of the re-appearance of Jesus to judge the world faded away, the Church obeyed a tendency to make its organisation durable. This was not aimed at so long as such hopes prevailed; why work for the future when the Second Coming is at hand? An effort was made by forging the Second Epistle of St. Peter to strengthen those hopes; but time worked against their fulfilment, and a belief in the millennium, too, died out. Unless it were heretical, or belonged to one of the decaying Judæo-Christian communities, every church had a bishop. Into his hands had passed the powers of the Presbyters who originally, with their subordinate deacons and deaconesses, administered the affairs of a church. To exhibit, with the authority belonging to a chief apostle, the power inherent in a bishop, along with his duties, with those of the functionaries of the church subordinated to him, and last but not least, with those of each member of the church, the three pastoral epistles were written, pur-

porting, and only purporting, to come from St. Paul, though containing some things not unworthy of the Apostle. Not only is there ordained in them a strict surveillance of the morals of the flock, but a rule of orthodoxy is established. The obstinate heretic is to be rejected. Marcion and other heresiarchs who flocked to Rome, found to their cost this monition unsparingly put in force.

The volume opens with a vivid sketch of the character and career of the Emperor Adrian, the accomplished, the versatile, the witty, hovering like a beneficent deity over the vast dominions subject to him, building and re-building cities and temples, promoting the execution of great public works, encouraging philosophy, and improving the laws and their administration. Adrian, a sceptic at heart, was tolerant and disinclined to allow the execution of the laws penally affecting the Christian to be pushed to extremities. It was under the otherwise beneficent rule of Adrian's successor, Antoninus Pius, that the persecution of the Christians was carried out on a considerable scale. The Christians as they increased in numbers became more conspicuous, and therefore more unpopular. Their seclusion from the world, their refusal to join in the religious observances of their fellow-citizens, made these Puritans of the Roman Empire disliked by the populace. The dislike thus created was intensified by absurd charges against their morals; their proceedings when they met for worship being represented as stained by the most dissolute practices and darkest crimes. It was especially in the provinces, and unknown to the

Emperor, that the persecutions were most frequent, the authorities aiding and abetting the populace. Any physical calamity was regarded as due to the wrath of the Gods offended by the existence of a community who refused to acknowledge them, and then arose the terrible cry, "Christianos ad leones!" Renan admits, as most impartial students of the time admit, that the Christians often voluntarily courted martyrdom as a testimony to their sincerity, and as opening to them the doors of heaven. But this was not the case with the venerable and saintly Polycarp, of Smyrna, the friend of the Apostle John, the well-known story of whose martyrdom is told by Renan with a pathetic simplicity. He had always declared that martyrdom if not to be shunned was not to be courted. He did not court it, but he did not shun it when his choice lay between death and the denial of his Saviour. A few years later the most notable of the new school of Christian apologists, the valiant but imprudent Justin, was martyred in Rome itself. When recording the death of Justin, Renan reminds his Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen that their Church too could persecute cruelly when it had the power, and through one of the best of French kings:—"How many precursors of the future suffered equally under the reign of the just and pious Saint Louis," persecutor of Jews and heretics!

In the April of 1880 Renan came to London to deliver the Hibbert Lectures of the year; the subject, "Christianity and Rome."

"The moment chosen," says Sir M. E. Grant Duff, "was an unlucky one, for a good many people who would have liked to have

'sat under him' were far away"—the country was in the throes of a General Election followed by the change of ministry which substituted in the Premiership Mr. Gladstone for Lord Beaconsfield. "I was myself in the North of Scotland, looking after my election, and many of my friends were in a similar plight. I got back just in time to hear the last lecture—14th April—and to admire the extraordinary perfection of the lecturer's enunciation. Every one in the room who knew French must have heard every word. He came to stay with me at Twickenham, and at a house which from the days of Lord Chancellor Clarendon downwards has seldom, I think, opened its door to a better man. I asked the Breakfast Club to meet him, but the disturbance caused by the great political contest still kept people away from London, and that body was represented only by Sir T. Erskine May, Lord Arthur Russell, and myself."

Renan was, however, abundantly fêted and caressed by friends and admirers who remained in London in spite of the political crisis. From a paper on "M. Ernest Renan at Home" (*Pall Mall Budget*, 28th January 1892), I take the following reminiscence of his visit to London. When the Rev. H. R. Haweis paid him in Paris a return visit, Renan was domiciled in the Collège de France as its Rector or Director, an office to which he had been elected in 1873 by his brother-professors. He prized it above all other French educational institutions, and looked on the distinction of administering its affairs as the greatest that he had as yet received; and he received it from the Third Republic.

"We spoke of those dear friends in England who had passed away since M. Renan's visit, especially of Dean Stanley, for whom Renan had entertained a sincere admiration which was thoroughly reciprocated by the versatile Dean. I remember dining with M. Renan in London one night when the Dean sat opposite us. Dean

Stanley's French accent left much to be desired, but his volubility was indisputable, and although nothing but French was spoken, I was filled with wonder and surprise at the brilliant flow of anecdote and repartee which Stanley kept up across the table with M. Renan in the least idiomatic and most fluent French which I ever heard. Still both these illustrious men by sheer force of will and *bonhommie* found out how to be thoroughly intelligible and interesting to each other at dinner-time.

"Mr. Henry Irving was another mutual friend the mention of whose name recalled the interesting occasion on which I introduced him to M. Renan. Mr. Irving had placed a double box at our disposal. M. Renan watched the great actor's subtle impersonation of the immortal Jew with the keenest zest and with such occasional interjections as 'Ah! c'est admirable! c'est fort! c'est antique!' At the close of the second act, Mr. Irving invited us to his private room. Both began speaking simultaneously, but as Mr. Irving spoke no French and M. Renan no English, an inevitable pause ensued. Mr. Irving then turned to me and said, 'I love M. Renan; will you tell him that I think I acted perhaps better than I do sometimes—I was so anxious to please him, and tried to do my best.' After I had translated, M. Renan replied, 'Pray, assure Mr. Irving that I have made a special study of the people of Israel for many years, but I never received so vivid an impression of the cultivated Jew of that period as I have to-night.' Mr. Irving replied, 'I am glad M. Renan has seized my point.'"

Of Renan's acquaintance with Tennyson during this visit to London a pleasant reminiscence has been already given. Renan's four Hibbert Lectures were delivered, in French of course, in St. George's Hall, and were well attended and duly applauded. He sketched the history of Christianity in Rome and the Roman empire from its beginning to its establishment by Constantine. Evidently Renan did not give his hearers credit for a familiarity with the six volumes which had

then appeared of his *Origines du Christianisme*, unless, perhaps, it were the *Vie de Jésus*. With the exception of some introductory remarks on the thoroughly aristocratic nature of the pagan religion of old Rome, so little suited to attach the people to it, there was scarcely anything in the four lectures which had not been said in the six volumes, page after page of which was read to his unsuspecting hearers. The lectures at St. George's Hall were followed by one to the members of the Royal Institution, on Marcus Aurelius. This lecture gave Renan no more trouble than the other. He had already prepared, though not published, his concluding volume of the *Origines*, *Marc Aurèle et la Fin du Monde Antique*. The lecture at the Royal Institution was little more than a summary of it.

That volume on "Marcus Aurelius and the End of the Roman World," was issued in 1881, and nobly completed the great work which it closed. A deep and twofold interest is aroused by the spectacle of one of the best of men, absolute ruler of the greatest empire that the world had yet seen, and at the same time disclosing in his *Meditations* his inmost thoughts on himself, on human nature, and human life. His reign was that of a philanthropist as well as of a philosopher. He reformed the laws by humanising them. Institutions for aiding the poor, adult and young, were made more effective than ever. The cruel position of the slave was greatly mitigated. Some way was made with a reformation of manners, although even Marcus Aurelius could not wholly succeed in his efforts to put an end to the savage brutalities of the amphitheatre. He summoned

philosophers from all parts to Rome, and though the gold of the philosopher was dimmed by many quacks and impostors who thought of nothing more than the rewards showered on the sect, Marcus selected only those of genuine worth to be attached to his person and to advise him in carrying out his reforms. "For the first time," Renan says, "the ideal of Plato was realised, the world was governed by philosophers." In point of fact, philosophy had become a kind of religion, the only religion of cultivated men. Great people had in their households sages, who were to them at once guides, philosophers, and friends.

The pacific emperor was summoned to the Danube to confront a coalition of the barbarians against Rome, and acquitted himself admirably of his uncongenial duties as a general. But his *ennui* was great, and he relieved it by writing his famous *Meditations.* The vanity of all things is present to the mind of him who wrote them, yet he is sustained and fortified by a deep sense of his duty to himself as a man, and to others as an emperor. For himself he is grateful to the gods, not for making him an emperor, but from the first a philosopher, for the good instructors whom he had in youth, for having been enabled to share the old age of his mother, for his affectionate (?) wife, and for having always at his command wherewith to aid the poor and the afflicted. He is not a man of systems or of dogmas, and hence the "singular elevation" of his book. "Take away the Christian dogmas from the famous *Imitation of Christ*, and the book loses part of its charm. The book of Marcus Aurelius, having no dogmatic basis, will

preserve its freshness everlastingly. To all, from the atheist, or him who thinks himself one, to the man most engrossed by the particular creed of any religious communion, it is fruitful in edification. It is the most purely human of all books." But as the years rolled on, as old friends died off, and Marcus felt that while admiring him people were tired of him and his philosophical rule, above all as his son Commodus, whom he had proclaimed his successor by an act beyond recall, displayed incorrigible vice, an infinite sadness is readable between the lines of the later *Meditations*. Marcus sighed for death, and it soon came to him.

Christianity was never more extensively persecuted or more severely punished than under this best of emperors. Renan seeks to explain this flagrant anomaly. To begin with, Fronto, the preceptor of Marcus, had a bitter hatred for the Christians. They were hated too by the philosophers who surrounded Marcus, and by the men of letters of the age, who regarded them as the dupes of illiterate teachers. Marcus himself adhered as an emperor to the Roman tradition, and like his favourite sage Epictetus saw in the heroism of the Christian martyrs only the obstinacy of deluded fanatics. Renan compares the position of the Christians in a centre of the Roman Empire, to that of a Protestant missionary preaching against the Virgin and the Saints in a fanatically Roman Catholic town in Spain. Now that we know the ultimate destiny of Christianity in the Roman Empire, we blame Marcus for not having been more tolerant. "But," says Renan, "we ought not to reproach a statesman for not having

effected a radical revolution in anticipation of events which were to happen several centuries after him. Trajan, Adrian, Marcus Aurelius could not master principles of general history and of state policy which were not apprehended until the eighteenth century, and which could be revealed only by our latest revolutions." If the Roman Empire was cruel to Christianity, the Christian Louis XIV. persecuted his Protestant subjects.

When the wise, the good Marcus Aurelius died, A.D. 180, the Church so harshly persecuted during his reign was more or less completely constituted. Episcopal authority is everywhere, and is based on apostolical succession. A sort of primacy is conceded to the Church of Rome. The canon of the New Testament is closed. The divinity of Jesus is acknowledged. Christianity has broken completely with Judaism; the sacred day of the week is the first not the seventh, while baptism is substituted for circumcision. The eucharist is no longer merely a commemoration but a sacrifice. The piety of the Christian communities was of rather an ascetic kind, and while marriage was invested with a high religious character, the tendency was to encourage celibacy. The Christian communities were little groups of pious people, leading pure lives and forming each a happy family, the members of which, coming together once a week to join in a simple and edifying worship, exerted a powerful attraction on the better class of pagans outside them. The national religion of Rome was aristocratic, not popular, and the immoralities of the gods had become repulsive. The philosophers endeavoured to appeal to the higher religious aspirations of humanity, but they

addressed the cultivated classes, not the uninstructed and the poor. The Stoics, moreover, had nothing to say to the sinner, whom Christianity pardoned and welcomed. Neither stoicism nor paganism offered, like Christianity, a life beyond the grave in which the anomalies of this life were to be redressed, and those who loved each other might meet again. In such a world as that of the Roman Empire, such a religion as the Christian could not but conquer the worship of Jupiter. Persecution itself aided Christianity by showing with what courage and strength it inspired its martyrs.

As the years rolled on, and the Christians increased in numbers, conquering the world instead of being conquered by it, while at the same time the expectation of the approaching end of all things died out, the moral fibre of the Christian community became relaxed. It was no longer easy for the believer—indeed, he was no longer expected as in the early days of the Church—to lead the purely Christian life of poverty and abnegation of every kind. Then monasticism arose. The monastery was to the circumambient Christian communities what these had been to the pagan world. Again the years rolled on, Christianity became the state-religion of Rome, and afterwards of the barbarians who overthrew the Western Empire. The influx of barbarians into the Church brought with it a tendency on the part of the Church to compromise with the idolators. Their polytheism was transformed into the worship of saints. The world from the sixth to the tenth century was, Renan goes the length of saying, more grossly pagan than it had ever been before. Along with the indulgence shown to

barbarian polytheism, Greek metaphysical notions were accepted, and in the Church councils "it is the dogma which is most superstitious that carries the day." At last the work of Jesus became so hidden in the additions made to it by superstition, metaphysics, and priest-craft that the reform of Christianity had for its aim to restore the religion which he preached. Something in that direction was effected by the sixteenth century reformers, but they retained a faith in the miraculous, and, in our own day, science has made miracle unbelievable. "Between Christianity and science there is, therefore, an inevitable conflict: one of the two adversaries must succumb."

As is not uncommon, however, with Renan, this strong statement is qualified by another. Not only is religion but a Church is to survive. Country and the family are the two great bonds which knit men together, but they are not all-sufficing. "Besides them there must be an institution to give nourishment to the soul, to console, to admonish. Such an institution is the Church, which cannot be dispensed with, except under the penalty of making life of a despairing aridity, especially for women. The ecclesiastical association of the future is, however, not to be allowed to weaken society as constituted in the State. The Church is to have no temporal power, but on the other hand is to be perfectly free." The State is to have nothing to do with it, is neither to control it nor patronise it. Renan's wish seems to be that the Church should consist of a number of small and free communities like those of the early ages of Christianity. And the religion of the future? Renan thinks that

there will be a great schism in the Roman Catholic Church.

"One section of it will persist in its idolatry and remain by the side of the modern movement like a parallel stretch of stagnant water. Another section will remain alive, and abandoning the errors of supernaturalism, will join itself to liberal Protestantism, to enlightened Israelitism, to idealist philosophy, and march towards the conquest of pure religion, a religion in spirit and in truth. But, whatever may be the religious future of humanity, it is beyond doubt that the place of Jesus in it will be immense. He was the founder of Christianity, and Christianity remains the bed of the great religious river of humanity. There affluents coming from the most opposite points of the horizon have commingled. In this combination no stream can now say, 'This is my water.' But let us not forget the primitive and original brook, the source in the mountain, the upper course where in a little spot of earth there first flowed what has become a river as broad as the Amazon. Of that upper course it has been my wish to form a picture, happy if I have faithfully represented what on those lofty summits there was of strength and vigour, of sensations now glowing, now icy cold, of divine life, and of commune with the sky. Rightly do the creators of Christianity take their place in the foremost rank of those to whom mankind do homage. These men were very much our inferiors in the knowledge of reality, but they had no equals in strength of conviction, in devotedness. And this it is which makes the founder. The solidity of an edifice is in proportion to the sum of virtue, that is to say, of sacrifices, which has been deposited in its foundations."

In 1878, Renan's fame had been crowned by his election to the French Academy, in succession to the great physiologist, Claude Bernard. In the spring of 1879 the new Academician delivered his address on being formally received. As usual, his address consisted largely of a panegyric on his predecessor, and Renan's versatility was once more displayed in his appreciative

estimate of Claude Bernard's discoveries and scientific method. At the same time he did not conceal his heterodoxy when, after reiterating one of his earliest and most cherished convictions, that modern science had made the universe infinitely grander and more beautiful than it appeared to the non-scientific ages, he added that the disappearance of a faith in the supernatural "will only bestow more sublimity on the ideal world," and so on. Among the addresses of welcome which Renan was called on to deliver on the reception of new Academicians, was one on Pasteur, in which again Renan showed his mastery of a subject apparently, and only apparently, alien to his studies, and described Pasteur's career as "a train of light in the great night of the infinitely little, in those ultimate abysses of Being in which life is born." In Renan's address of reception to Ferdinand de Lesseps there is a very noticeable passage. While Lesseps himself, and so many others, were hymning the Suez Canal as a great work of peace, Renan took a very different view of it. One Bosphorus, he said, had hitherto sufficed to trouble the world. Lesseps had created another and a more important one. In the event of a naval war the canal would be the point which all the world would make for in order to occupy it. Lesseps had marked out the arena for the great battles of the future.

It was partly a symptom, partly a result of the seemingly sceptical mood into which Renan had fallen for a time, that he translated the most sceptical book in the Bible, Ecclesiastes. Renan's *L'Ecclésiaste* appeared in 1879. The Preacher, Renan's Cohelet, proclaims the vanity

of all things, knowledge, science, literature, power, riches, the love of women, life itself. He sees wickedness triumphant and virtue miserable. Nor has he any hope that this anomaly will be redressed in a future life. Man is as the beast: "As the one dieth so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast, for all is vanity." But Cohelet does not, and in truth need not, like Job, curse his day, and raise an indignant protest against the decrees of the Creator. Cohelet's lot on earth has taught him that there is something worth living for. "Go thy way; eat thy bread with joy and drink thy wine with a merry heart. . . . Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun." And ever and anon Cohelet rises into a graver strain, and for moments preaches duty and reverence to the God who judges all things. Cohelet's combination, or alternation, of doubt and faith, Renan, in his preliminary "study" on Ecclesiastes, pronounces to be "the true philosophy." I deny, he seems to say, but at the same time I not only allow you, but I wish you, to affirm. "However the sceptic may argue, the necessary beliefs are above all attack. . . . Ring out, church bells, the more you ring, the more will I allow myself to say that your warbling means nothing definite! If I were afraid of silencing you, ah! then I should become timid and discreet." Renan rejects altogether the orthodox ascription of Ecclesiastes to Solomon. He conjectures it to have been written about B.C. 100 by a Jewish philosopher and Sadducee. He belongs to a class

represented in the Bible only by Ecclesiastes, and revived in the wealthy Israelites of Paris and other great European towns of the nineteenth century. Of this modern type of Jew Renan gives a very clever and, once in a way, a somewhat sarcastic description, too long for quotation here.

Renan was verging on sixty when he resolved on writing the autobiographical volume, which appeared in 1883, *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse* (Memoirs of Childhood and Youth). One of his objects was doubtless to indicate the steps by which a tonsured seminarist had become the author of the *Vie de Jésus*, and thanks to the *Souvenirs*, the reader of these pages has been pretty amply enlightened on that subject. Renan tells very little of his biography after he severed his connection with the Roman Catholic Church, but looking at himself as he was and as he is, he takes his readers into his confidence and unbosoms himself very freely. He avers that he has kept in spirit, if not in letter, his first clerical vows, better indeed than many priests leading a life to all appearance regular. He has never sought after success; on the contrary, it bored him. The pleasure of producing and living suffices him. On the whole, if he had to live his life over again, he would alter nothing in it. He has every reason to be satisfied with his lot, and, indeed, did not his principles forbid it, he would believe that special providences had guided him from a humble origin to be what he has become. The age in which he has lived may not be found to have been the greatest, but it will certainly be found to have been the most amusing of all, and he

speaks of his own life as a charming promenade which it has been accorded to him to take through this mysterious world of ours. The autobiographical interest of the volume, the sketches of scenes and persons of many kinds, given in his own fascinating style, made the *Souvenirs* one of the most successful of Renan's books.

In the preface to the *Souvenirs*, the quasi-optimistic mood in which, for the nonce, Renan finds himself, reconciles him to the French republic, then apparently consolidated. After all, he says, our personal tastes, perhaps our prejudices, ought not to lead us to run counter to what our age is effecting. Perhaps our age is in the right. The world, Renan thinks, is marching towards "Americanism," towards Democracy pure and simple, towards a state of things in which personal distinction is little prized, in which politics are handed over to inferior men, and the rewards of life are given to vulgarity, charlatanism, and the art of puffing. But democracy will at least offer to the intellect that which the intellect chiefly requires, freedom. The royal patronage formerly extended to talent had its good side, but also its bad. The concessions which in those days, gone for ever, intellect had to make to the Court, to society, to the clergy, were worse, in Renan's view, than the little disagreeables to be suffered from democracy. But there is one passage in his otherwise rather cheerful confessions which breathes of deep regret, though not at all bitterly expressed. He laments that when the professor at Issy charged him with not being a Christian, he did not forego the subsequent residence at St. Sulpice. In such a case he would have followed his

inclination for physiology and the natural sciences. But he went to St. Sulpice, and was there drawn towards the historical sciences, "small conjectural sciences which are unmade as soon as made, and which will be neglected in a hundred years." Renan sees the day dawning when man will no longer attach much interest to his past. The riddle of existence, of the world, of "God, as they wish to call him," is to be read in chemistry at one end of the scale, in astronomy at the other end, and above all in general physiology. The regret of Renan's life was that he had chosen inquiries, which will never be more than interesting, "into a reality which has for ever disappeared." But this regret, it will be seen, did not hinder Renan from pursuing to the end of his days the inquiries which engrossed him at the beginning of his career. A mission had been assigned to him, and he could not escape from fulfilling it.

In 1884 appeared the *Nouvelles Études d'Histoire Religieuse* (New Studies of Religious History), another volume of republished contributions to periodicals. Among its miscellaneous contents, all of them full of life and interest, is that essay on Buddhism which Renan offered as his first contribution to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and which was declined by its proprietor and editor. In this essay Renan had summarised, in his own inimitable way, that strange religion of Nihilism which, encrusted with innumerable myths and legends, has more followers than any other, and has gained such devotees as Schopenhauer in the Christian Europe of the nineteenth century. Renan prizes highly the doctrines of abnegation, humanity, and humility, taught by Sakya-Muni (*the*

Buddha), and places him among non-Christian teachers by the side of Jesus. In an essay of much later date, published in the same volume, he examined a recent theory maintained in France, which went even farther than Strauss had gone in his first Life of Jesus, and while denying that the Buddha had ever existed, resolved his biography into a series of myths. Following his usual practice in such cases, Renan substituted for myths legends containing a kernel of truth, and, considering the ethical superiority of Buddhism to the Hinduism out of which it sprang (just as Christianity sprang out of Judaism), he maintained that there must have been a real historical personage who founded Buddhism. The subject of another paper is St. Francis of Assisi, Renan's favourite saint, whom he delights to call a second Jesus. Here again, through all the legends which have gathered round St. Francis, there is clearly seen the resemblance of the saint to the portrait of him painted by his biographers. Beautiful indeed is Renan's sketch of the founder of the Franciscan order, one which might have worked a revolution in the religious world had not the astute Church of Rome transformed it into something very different from the ideal conceived by St. Francis. Renan paints him in his delicious valley in Umbria, "the Galilee of Italy," realising in his daily life the Sermon on the Mount, wedded to poverty, loving not only men but all things that have life, with nothing in him of the Eastern fakir or Buddhist ascetic, joyous, companionable, sociable even with brigands, delighting in the songs of the troubadours, and himself the author of that lovely canticle of thanksgiving to the Creator for

all that he has created, from the sun and moon and the elements to "our mother earth" with its fruits and herbs and bright-blossoming flowers. The address on Spinoza has been already adverted to.

Renan's reputation and popularity were now at their height. The chiefs of French literature who had achieved fame when he began his career, Hugo and Lamartine, Michelet, Quinet, and Littré, were in their graves. Renan was recognised as indisputably the foremost man of letters in contemporary France. Even his superficial Hedonism, if it made his austerer friends wince, increased his vogue with others. He was a favourite guest in the highest circles, and Madame Renan's receptions at the Collège de France rivalled what had been the success of Madame Mohl in her husband's life-time. The demands made on Renan to deliver speeches and addresses on all sorts of occasions, and to all sorts of audiences, were incessant. Besides his frequent addresses on the reception of new academicians, he delivered lectures to Jewish associations on the glories of the Judaism of old and the composite character which its ancient proselytism had given to the Jewish race. At the Sorbonne he answered the question "what is a nation?" by showing, without even mentioning Alsace and Lorraine, that the inhabitants of provinces constituted as these were formed a nation, which should not be annexed without its will by a foreign conquering power. He distributed the prizes and gave good advice to the pupils of the Lycée Louis le Grand (Voltaire's old seminary), and addressing an association of Paris students, he bade them avoid the prevalent pessimism, and enjoy

themselves while they were young as well as study hard. To a society for the propagation of the French language he showered praises not only on that graceful tongue, but on French gaiety, and French wine. At a banquet in honour of his old friend Berthelot, it is Renan who is the mouthpiece of the company, and who dilates on the merits of the guest and advantages of science. Renan is the spokesman of the Académie des Inscriptions at the funeral of its distinguished member Villemain, and when former hearers of Michelet, Quinet, and Mickiewicz present to the Collège de France memorial-medallions of those three of its former gifted professors, Renan, in a graceful speech, returns thanks for the welcome gift. It was Renan who pronounced the "Farewell" to Tourgenieff at the Paris railway station when his coffined corpse was borne homeward, happily characterising him as the interpreter of "that great Slav race whose appearance in the front of the world's stage is the most unexpected phenomenon of the century."

But the most personally interesting of all Renan's addresses are two which he delivered in his native and still-loved Brittany. In August, 1884, he was present at a gathering held in his honour at Tréguier, his birthplace. Forty years before he had quitted it for Paris, and in the interval he had paid it only a rare flying visit. He found the old ecclesiastical town outwardly very much the same as in the days of his boyhood, and the Paris newspaper-men who came to report the proceedings were lost in wonder at the contrast between the brilliant city where they plied their pens, and the survival of hoar ecclesiastical antiquity which they found at sombre and lifeless Tréguier.

Renan's address of thanks was naturally a touching one. While so much remained, so much else was gone for ever; he had lost the mother—she died under his roof at eighty-five—and the sister who had watched over his early years. Of his excellent teachers only one survived. As to himself, he was old in body—rheumatism made him walk with difficulty—but in soul he was the same. His ruling passion from first to last had been the love of truth. *Veritatem dilexi* is the epitaph which he would wish to have inscribed on his tomb—and this last resting-place he should like so much to be in those old cloisters of the cathedral which he had haunted as a child and had been re-visiting; "but the cloister is the Church, and the Church, very wrongly, will have none of me." To obey truth he had snapped asunder the dearest ties. In acting thus he was a genuine Breton, one of "an unsophisticated race, which is simple enough to believe in truth and goodness." The Bretons are the true sons of the Celtic Pelagius, who denied original sin. "A criticism which the Protestants are always addressing to me is, 'What does M. Renan make of sin?' *Mon Dieu*, I think that I know nothing of these melancholy dogmas. I confess to you, the more I think of it the more I find that all the philosophy of the world is summarised in good humour," a remark very characteristic of Renan in his old age. The great recipe for happiness, such as he has fully enjoyed, he will leave with them. "It is not to seek for happiness, but to preserve an unselfish aim, science, art, the good of our kind, to be of use to our fatherland." The cordiality of his reception at Tréguier led him to seek a summer

domicile in his native region, especially as he wished to have once a year months of a quietude which Paris would not allow for the composition of the second great work of his life, of which more hereafter. He found what he sought at Rosmapanon, on the Breton coast, near Lannion, in a solitary house, only a few yards from the sea, and among pleasant woods. Its former occupant appears to have been a harsh man. The neighbouring peasantry allowed no fruit to ripen in his garden, nor a single vegetable to be gathered for his table. With the substitution for him of the kind-hearted Renan all this was altered, and the police no longer needed to keep an eye on the kitchen-garden of that house by the sea! Here he received the Welsh Archæological Association, to whom he told the anecdote of Tennyson at Lannion, already given. In Paris, Renan did not forget that he was a Breton. He was a constant guest at the monthly dinner of Bretons resident in Paris, founded by his friend, the Breton poet Quellien, and samples of his speeches on those occasions, full of gaiety and geniality, were printed in his *Feuilles Détachées*.

This volume of "Detached Leaves," stray papers, was issued in 1892, the year of Renan's death. It contained two essays, one a criticism on Amiel's well-known journal, the other "Examen de Conscience Philosophique" (Interpretation of Philosophic Consciousness), containing more matured expressions of his views on man and the Cosmos than those in the Dialogues Philosophiques. In the preface, morever, to the *Feuilles Détachées*, Renan speaks his last word on those mysteries of Being, of life and of death,

which were seldom long out of Renan's meditative mind. The *Examen* was written away from Paris, at Rosmapanon, in solitude by the sea. Once more, according to Renan, there is no trace of a God in the visible universe, least of all in the planet earth. "Atheism is logical. The *fieri*—the process of Being always Becoming by an internal development without external intervention—is the law of the whole universe which we perceive." Yet this universe, which Renan insists on calling almost unconscious, produces, he affirms (strangely it appears to me), not only human consciousness, but prescribes to man self-sacrifice, duty, virtue, and takes care that these its commands are obeyed, although poor man feels that in obeying them he is the victim of illusion. Renan discovers an adequate image of his almost unconscious, yet wonderfully creative universe, in so lowly an organism as the pearl-oyster:

"In the depth of the abyss, obscure germs create a consciousness singularly ill-served by organs, but nevertheless prodigiously skilful in attaining its ends. What is called a disease in this little living *cosmos* produces a secretion of ideal beauty which men seize on, and for which they lavish gold. The general life of the universe is like that of the oyster, vague, obscure, singularly obstructed, and consequently slow. Suffering creates the mind, the intellectual and moral movement of humanity. Disease of the world if you will, in reality pearl of the world, the spirit of man is the aim, the final cause, the last and certainly the most brilliant result of the universe which we inhabit."

But Renan cannot rest satisfied, like the Positivist and the Agnostic, with a knowledge of mere phenomena. So far as I understand his abstruse ratiocination, and on such matters it behoves one to speak with diffidence,

Renan finds in the varying orders of infinity established by the infinitesimal calculus a symbolism which encourages him to hope. On the supposition that the starry universe, sections of which we see with our eyes and telescopes, is infinite (and the contrary supposition that it is finite may be true), then it is conceivable, Renan says, that there is a superior universe, a knowledge of which may be reserved for us.

"Perhaps one day a God will reveal himself to us. The eternity of our universe ceases to be assured from the moment we are allowed to suppose that it is subordinated to an infinity. This superior infinity may dispose of the inferior, utilise it, apply it to the purpose of its superior. . . . From this point a God, with special volitions of his own, and who does not appear in our universe, may be held to be possible in the bosom of infinitude, or at least it is as rash to deny as to affirm such a possibility."

In his critical essay on Amiel's Journal Renan had expressed his dissent from the doctrine of the necessary and universal immortality of the soul, and virtually said on this point, "Plato, thou reasonest *ill*." Renan's preference was for a bodily resurrection, and a resurrection only of those who had been dominated by a love of the good and the true. This seems to have remained Renan's view when, two years afterwards, he wrote the *Examen*:—

"To sum up, the existence of a superior consciousness of the universe is much more probable than the immortality of the individual. On this last point we have no other basis for our hopes than the assumption, a large one, of the goodness of the Supreme Being. For him one day everything will be possible. Let us hope that he will then choose to be just, and that he will bestow life and conscious feeling on those who shall have contributed to the triumph of the good. It will be a miracle. But the miraculous, that

is to say the intervention of a superior being, which does not take place at present, may one day, when God will become conscious, be the normal rule of the universe. The Judeo-Christian dreams which place at the terminus of humanity the reign of God still preserve their grandiose truth. The world, governed now by a blind or powerless consciousness, may be governed some day by one more reflective. Reparation will then be made for every injustice, every tear will be dried. *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes"* (Rev. xxi. 5).

What was a belief to the writer of the Revelation ascribed to St. John was still, after nearly eighteen centuries, a faint hope for Ernest Renan.

But if these great possibilities are held to be chimerical, what remains for us poor sons of men to do and to think? Time was when Renan, following Kant in his second *Kritik*, believed that the love of goodness and of truth, that the determination of saints, martyrs, and the noble-minded of all ages to sacrifice themselves for what they deemed to be the good and the true, testified to the existence of a deity who directly inspired those feelings. For the Renan of the *Examen*, God has vanished from our universe, though possibly domiciled, more or less nascent, in another. Yet we are not now, as Renan once advised, to accept the epicurean philosophy of the Preacher. Renan's earlier nobleness shows itself again, and he is not to be reproached for his inconsistency. We are to be good, and true, and self-sacrificing because the "voices of the universe bid us be good, true, and self-sacrificing, in a language coming from the infinite, perfectly clear in what it commands, obscure in what it promises." In the preface to the *Feuilles Détachées*, a preface probably written two years after

the *Examen*, Renan approximates to a distincter theistic faith. God is not visible in our Cosmos, but he may have created it and be behind it, so to speak. The following is the very ingenious illustration of Renan's meaning, given not long before he was summoned to the grave, and knew what there is to be known "behind the veil." His denial of a supernatural intervention is based, he says, on the experience of thousands of centuries :—

"But thousands of centuries are a nothing in infinite time. What we call long is relatively short by another standard of largeness. When the chemist has arranged an experiment which is to last a year, during the time fixed he does not any more touch his apparatus. All that goes on in his retorts is there regulated by the laws of the absolutely unconscious; but this is consistent with the intervention of a will at the beginning of the experiment, and with another intervention at its close. During the interval millions of microbes may have been produced in the apparatus. If these microbes possessed sufficient intelligence they might allow themselves to say, 'This world is not governed by any special volition.' They would be right as regards the short period granted to their observation, but as regards the great totality of the universe they would be mistaken."

The chemist is, or may be, God, his apparatus our planet, we the microbes.

"What we call infinite time is perhaps," Renan adds, "a minute between two miracles. 'We do not know,' is all that we can say as regards that which is beyond the finite. Let us deny nothing, let us affirm nothing, let us hope."

If the Deity of this passage is not and cannot be seen by us, he is at least the God of our own Cosmos.

He is nearer to us than Renan's former God of the infinitesimal calculus.

However busy otherwise with his pen and with his lips, Renan had for six years been steadily advancing the last great work of his life, when, in 1887, was issued vol. i. of his *Histoire du Peuple d'Israël* (History of the People of Israel). In Renan's view the Origins of Christianity itself were set forth in this history of the Jews from their first appearance in Asia to the coming of Jesus. Christianity was not only the sequel, it was the offspring of Judaism. From the great prophets of Israel Jesus drew his earliest inspiration, and they had their roots in the "antique ideas" of the patriarchal life of the Hebrews. The books ascribed to Daniel and to Enoch, and such a work as the Assumption of Moses, suggested to Jesus his Messianic mission, and furnished him with his eschatology. Strictly speaking, a history of Israel should have preceded that of the Origins of Christianity. But, Renan says, in his fine preface, the duration of life is uncertain, and he began at the middle of his subject, specially attracted as he was by the character of Jesus, and the constant spell cast on him by "the dreams of a Kingdom of God which should have for its law love and self-sacrifice."

Of the five volumes of the *History of Israel* the two last appeared after Renan's death; the first three seem to have been prepared for the press during his lifetime. Though composed by him in years of much physical suffering, the book lacks none of the characteristics which gave a charm and a value to the history of the Origins of Christianity. The period, some 4000 years,

surveyed in the later work, is far more extensive than the century and a half of which the story is told in the earlier. The documents on which chiefly a history of Israel must be based are the books of the Old Testament, the accumulated literature of a thousand years, in which, until the era of the prophets, masses of legend are almost inextricably commingled with fragments of genuine history. In the hands of successive ancient editors, artlessly combining old documents and new, altering and interpolating to make the text support their own view as to the manner in which events ought to have happened, or had been said to have happened, the narrative, and even the prophetic, sections of the Old Testament, have been so transformed as to perplex at every turn the interpreter. Though aided throughout by the results of German research, Renan found it immensely difficult, sometimes almost impossible, to disentangle the true from the false, and with nothing but the faintest and very often doubtful indications to decipher the early history of the Hebrews. For these reasons, and from the vaster period embraced in it, conjecture had to play in it a far greater part than in Renan's history of early Christianity. In his preface to the History of Israel he candidly avowed that the reader must suppose the margin of the book strewed with perhapses, even after the ample use which he himself had made of them in the text. But he brought to his task the same commanding, if often daring ingenuity, the same lynx-eyed research, the same dexterity in throwing from the most unexpected quarters side-lights illuminating the obscure, which were displayed in his

earlier work. The book abounds, too, with admirable French translations of passages of the Old Testament, of which those from the Psalms are specially striking. Renan's Hebrew scholarship, as well as wonderful tact, enables him to suggest many emendations of the original; and of their merit, by comparing them with the translations in our own Authorised Version, the unlearned reader can judge for himself, often, I think, to find them most felicitous.

About 4000 years ago, in Renan's view, the Aryan race makes its appearance with its centre in Afghanistan, and the Semitic race, with its centre in Arabia. In mental endowments, in language, above all in religion, these two races—Renan repeating once more his favourite theory—present the greatest contrast to each other. The Aryan is naturally a polytheist; the Semite tends to monotheism. The Aryan deifies the elements and powers of nature, and has a special god for every great sphere of things. When in danger on the sea, the Aryan Greek invokes Poseidon; when he is sick, he offers vows to Asclepius; for a good harvest he prays to Demeter. The Semites, as early as we know them, believe in a myriad of spirits, called collectively Elohim, a plural noun which by governing a verb in the singular establishes their unity. But none of these Elohim have names of their own like the Aryan gods, and the Semite prayed to them in all cases as to a Sovereign God. True, this Sovereign God has a different name for each of the tribes who worship him. With one he is Baal, with another Moloch, with another Chemosh, but to save his theory of Semitic monotheism Renan explains

that all Semitic tribal names for the Deity signify the same thing—the Highest, the Omnipotent, and so forth.

It was not at once, but in the course of time, that the Elohim became for the tribe of the Semitic Israelites the one God, who, in the language of the Elohistic writer of the first verse of Genesis, "in the beginning created the heaven and the earth." Monotheism was founded by the Semites, and received from Judaism by Christianity and Islam has, outside India, triumphed over the polytheism of the great Aryan race to which the European nations chiefly belong. The very language of the Semites forbade the growth among them of mythology, which is the mother of polytheism, *nomina numina*. For the primitive Aryan every word enclosed a possible myth. The Semitic roots are hard, inorganic, realistic, infertile both of mythology and metaphysics. The nomadic life, which was that of the ancient Semites, strengthened their tendency to monotheism. The very nature of that life forbids the erection of temples and statues.

Semitic nomads wandering into Mesopotamia came into contact with the inhabitants of the region of Padan Aram—a sort of annex to Assyria—and there they found a people in possession of Babylonian literature and science, but speaking a language like their own. Hence the new-comers could assimilate the Babylonian legends, among them those of the creation, and the deluge, with that of the probably mythical Abraham. To explain the great superiority of the accounts of these matters given in the book of Genesis to those which have been disclosed to us by the decipherers of the cuneiform inscriptions, Renan has an ingenious theory. The newly-initiated

nomadic Semites, ignorant of the art of writing, and dependent on memory, reduced the diffuse Babylonian legends to something simple and concise which they could easily carry about with them. They infused a moral meaning into the story of the deluge, which became a punishment for the sins of mankind. In addition to the worship of the Elohim, these pastoral Semitic wanderers were now endowed with a rational cosmogony which the world has inherited from them.

Some of these tribes, known as Hebrews, tracing their descent to Terah and his supposed son Abraham, wandered into Syria. One of them, according to Renan, distinguished from the rest of the Hebrews by its seriousness and attachment to the worship of the Supreme God, was known as Israel. The Beni-Israel, sons of Israel, is Renan's favourite name for them. He will have it that the Beni-Israel included a clan superior to the rest, the Beni-Joseph, who, immigrating into Egypt, and finding themselves well received there, invited the rest of the tribe to follow them. They did so, and settled in the land of Goshen, where they led a pastoral life. To this is the beautiful and touching story of Joseph and his brethren, reduced by modern criticism! Renan restricts to a century the sojourn of Israel in Egypt. This sojourn, he considers, was injurious to the religion of the Beni-Israel. They adopted from Egypt the golden calf, the brazen serpent, the lying oracles,—all of them fatal gifts,—along with the Ark which plays so great and perhaps useful a part in the subsequent history of Israel. With the overthrow of the shepherd kings, whom Renan considers to have been Semites, and the accession of a native

dynasty, began the maltreatment of the Israelites in Egypt. Under harsh task-masters they had to slave in the construction of the great works, urban and others, undertaken by Rameses the Second, whom Renan calls an Egyptian Louis XIV. In the anarchy which he bequeathed to his successors, the Beni-Israel escape to the peninsula of Sinai. Renan is not at all assured that there ever was such a person as Moses; but on the whole is disposed to admit his probable existence, though it is likely that he was for the escaping Israelites a sort of Abd-el-Kader much more than the legislator whom tradition and imagination combined to make him. Among the numerous "perhapses" of this section of Renan's narrative, one thing stands out as tolerably clear to him. It is that with the march of the Israelites through the desert of Sinai, this mountain becomes to them the Olympus of their new national god Jahve (our Jehovah), whose worship, mingled as it became with that of the golden calf, of the brazen serpent, and the national gods of Syria, for many centuries eclipsed that of the Elohim. Renan can scarcely find language in which to express his disgust at the degradation of the old patriarchal religion. Jahve is a national, that is to say, a wicked God. He perverts Israel. He makes it cruel, unjust, treacherous, selfish, thinking only of its own interests.

"Happily," Renan exclaims in the midst of his sorrow and indignation, "happily there was in the genius of Israel something superior to the national prejudices. The old Elohism will never perish; it will survive, or rather will assimilate Jahveism. The monstrous excrescence will be extirpated. The prophets, and in particular Jesus, the last of them, will expel Jahve, the exclusive

god of Israel, and will return to the beautiful patriarchal formula of a father, equitable and good, the one God of the universe and of mankind."

But many centuries of legend and history have to be traversed before Renan and his readers arrive at this welcome consummation.

Each triumph of the Israelites in their gradual conquest of Palestine was celebrated in songs which, with some that arose out of their flight from Egypt, survived, unwritten, in the memory of the people. As the years rolled on, these songs received legendary additions, the whole, in the writing ages, assuming a narrative shape, prose connecting and elucidating the popular lyrics, and forming such a work as the Book of the Wars of Jahve, which contributes some material to the early chronicles of Israel. Of these lyrics the chaunt of Deborah is the grandest. Slowly coalescing into a nation, the Israelites passed from the rule of the Judges, resembling, Renan thinks, the Roman dictatorship, to a monarchical government under Saul. Renan considers David to have been a successful and fortunate bandit-chief, among whose unscrupulous acts was his desertion to the Philistines, the national enemy of Israel. But David gave Israel a capital in Jerusalem, and by fixing the Ark there, made it the centre of the religious worship of the nation. He established a standing army, and founded a dynasty which lasted five hundred years. Few men, according to Renan, were less religious than David, though legend made him a saint, and the authorship of psalms, only one or two fragments of which he could possibly have written, was ascribed to him. What David began in

making Jerusalem the religious centre of Israel, Solomon completed by building the first temple, and installing in it the Ark. But while doing this Solomon was by no means a fanatical devotee of Jahve. Jahve might be supreme in Jerusalem, but on the Mount of Olives, facing Zion, pagan deities were freely worshipped, among them Chemosh, the god of Moab, and of the famous Moabite inscription. One of the functions of the prophets of the future was to denounce such idolatry.

Solomon's reign was splendid but costly. Renan compares it in both respects to that of Louis XIV., at whose death his over-taxed subjects rejoiced. Solomon's death was followed by the successful revolt of the ten tribes, whom his exactions and forced labour had alienated; and by their establishment of the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam, there was left only the little kingdom of Judah to Solomon's successors, whose sovereignty did not extend beyond fifteen or twenty miles from Jerusalem. The discontent of the northern tribes with Solomon's luxurious harem had already probably found expression in the Song of Solomon, and the establishment of the kingdom of Israel was followed by the execution of a much more important literary work. Under David and Solomon the use of writing had considerably extended. According to Renan, about B.C. 930, some scribes of the new northern kingdom of Israel committed to writing (1) a book of legends containing those preserved by oral tradition from the beginning of things to the exodus; (2) a book of heroes, coming down to the kingship of David. Of this primal chronicle of Israel more hereafter.

Between the authority of the kings of Judah and that of the kings of Israel there was a great difference. While the kings of Judah became in a measure legitimate sovereigns, ruling by a sort of right divine, it was not so with the kings of Israel, the offspring of a rebellion, though a successful one. It was therefore to the kings of Israel, in so far as they encouraged the worship of heathen deities, that the boldest resistance could be offered in the name of Jahve by the prophets, who had long ceased to be mere sorcerers or diviners. Samuel himself, it will be remembered, had been consulted by the youthful Saul as to the whereabouts of his father's lost asses. Since the time of Samuel the prophets of Jahve had been more or less powers in the state. The struggle between them and the kings of Israel, who encouraged, or tolerated, pagan worship, came to a head when Ahab was confronted by Elijah. Renan thinks that possibly Elijah existed, but considers the accounts given of him to be legendary, or distorted by long-subsequent Jahveists, and is of the same opinion as regards Elijah's successor, Elisha. "Wherever Elijah and Elisha enter, the fabulous enters with them." The prophets, or prophetism, triumphed in Israel and in Judah: in Israel with the success of Jehu and the murder of Jezabel, in Judah with the assassination of Athaliah and the accession of a descendant of David to the throne. To Renan, Ahab, calumniated by the Jahveist chroniclers, is a remarkable sovereign, brave, intelligent, moderate, who did much for his people; while Jehu, the *protégé* of Elisha, was in cruelty and treachery a worthy precursor of Philip II. of Spain.

The two triumphs of prophetism just recorded occurred between B.C. 860 and 850. About the latter date, Renan conjectures, a writer in Israel, who from his use of the name of Jehovah (Jahve) is in modern times designated the Jehovist, undertook a very grand task. It was to take the two books, one of legends, the other of heroes, or of the wars of Jehovah, and adding to them floating traditions of his time, with the results of his own creative ingenuity, to construct a sacred history from the creation onwards. Some twenty-five years later, and without any knowledge of the work of his predecessor, though a rumour of its existence may have reached him, a notion of a similar kind occurred to a writer in Jerusalem, probably a priest in the Temple there, and called also in modern times the Elohist, because in his narrative he speaks of Elohim, and does not use the name Jehovah (Jahve) until he has reached the point at which it was supposed to have been formally promulgated by Moses. Much of the oral tradition possessed by the Jehovist was also at the command of, and was used by, the Elohist, who had over the other the advantage given by documents existing at Jerusalem on the lives of David and Solomon. Further, Renan supposes, about the time of Hezekiah, the works of the Elohist and the Jehovist were combined in one, but yet so as to show in numerous passages the handiwork of the Jehovist and of the Elohist respectively. Since the acceptance of a theory of some such kind it has been one of the main objects of biblical critics to discover and assign to each of the two the passages belonging to each.

Considerations of space forbid anything like a re-

production of Renan's characteristics of each author, and his indication of the passages which may be assigned to each. Some of them, however, must be touched on. The account of the creation in the first chapter of Genesis is the Elohist's, the discrepant account of it in the second chapter is the Jehovist's. To the Jehovist is to be assigned the account of the garden of Eden and of the fall. To the Pentateuch the Jehovist contributed what Renan calls the Book of the Covenant (*L'Alliance*), the commands and code contained in Exodus xx. 24 to xxiii. 19 inclusive. Here, while remaining the one God of Israel, Jahve shows himself just, humane, merciful, the protector of the weak, punishing injustice and cruelty. But it is not to be supposed that, apart from its embodiment of the then existing customary law, such a code had any legal force, or represented anything more than the personal theories of the Jehovist. Certainly the precepts respecting the Sabbatical year were never applied in practice. While the glory of framing this benevolent code belongs to the Jehovist, to the Elohist belongs that of promulgating the Decalogue, which is purely ethical, and in which nothing is said of sacrifice or ritual. With the Decalogue Jahve and Elohim become one.

Some fifty years (probably B.C. 800) after the composition of the Jehovist narrative of the early history of Israel, there appeared in the person of Amos, "the herdsman of Tekoah," the first of that new school of prophets whose utterances have been preserved for us in writing, who were teachers of the pure theology and morality, which, in Renan's view, anticipated the teaching of

Jesus. In portraying these prophets, Renan puts forth all his strength. He is struck with wonder and admiration at the spectacle which they present. Here are men deriving the great authority which they exert as reformers of the popular creed and social ethics from nothing more than their own assertion that they are inspired by God, and are interpreters of His will. They proclaim themselves called on to effect a profound revolution in His worship, and another in the social arrangements of the nation. The monotheism which they preached, when all the world and many of their own countrymen were sunk in idolatry, has become the creed of the foremost nations of the Aryan race. In the midst of Oriental tyranny and servility the Hebrew prophets were the first to proclaim the rights of man. Renan is not blind to their faults, and to the exaggeration sometimes conspicuous in their teaching. Their symbolism was sometimes grotesque, their denunciations of the arts of life were often one-sided, and the theocracy which they upheld was injurious to patriotism and national self-reliance. In their occasionally blind fury and fanaticism, Renan compares them to the Radical and Socialistic journalists of his own contemporary France; but their aberrations sink into insignificance in the light of their transcendent merits. Save for them and for what, so to speak, led up to them, Renan declares that he would have disdained to write the history of a petty nation whose ordinary life was in no way superior to that of the Moabites and the Edomites, and who, like them, would have been forgotten but for the prophets.

The key-note of the new school of prophecy is struck

by Amos. The Jahve, who was the tribal deity of the Hebrews, just as Chemosh was of the Moabites, is now the God not of Palestine merely but of the universe, "he that formeth the mountains and createth the wind and declareth unto man what is his thought,—that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth." The "Lord God" of Amos is not, as Jahve had been, and as the Gods of the Heathen were, to be propitiated by sacrifices, "*Though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace-offerings of fat beasts . . . but let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.*" To "oppress the poor, to crush the needy," is a crime of crimes. That justice is venal, is among "the manifold transgressions," and "the mighty sins," denounced by Amos. Justice is denied to the humble through a conspiracy of the wealthy with the judges. "*They afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor from the gate.*" After Amos Hosea represents God as saying: "*I will have mercy and not sacrifice.*" To Amos and Hosea nothing essential was added, Renan thinks, by subsequent prophets, not even by Isaiah, though, according to Renan, he is the greatest of them all, besides being a man of superb literary genius: he "writes like a Greek," Renan's highest formula of praise. Under the good Hezekiah, a king according to Isaiah's own heart, the new piety of the prophets flourished practically as well as theoretically, and to the saintly people who surrounded the king Renan assigns the authorship of much of the book of Psalms, "perhaps the most beauti-

ful, and certainly the most fruitful creation of the genius of Israel." After a reaction from the pietism of the reign of Hezekiah, a successor worthy of him, the iconoclastic Josiah, ascends the throne of Judah, and with him appears the terrible Jeremiah. With the reign of two reforming kings there had grown up a need for a Law sanctioning the principles and practices of the new theocracy. The Book of the Covenant was little known beyond the Temple; indeed, Renan thinks that it may have existed only in a single copy. The result was the Book of the Law, which its composers ascribed to Moses, which Josiah was told (B.C. 622) had been found in the Temple, and which comprises all of our present Deuteronomy, from verse 45 of Chapter iv. to the end of Chapter xxviii. Renan thinks that the book was manufactured by the priests, and that, though Jeremiah's name is not mentioned in connection with the transaction, he was the soul of the whole of the "pious intrigue." The book of the Law was, in Renan's opinion, "the worst enemy of the universal religion dreamt of by the prophets of the eighth century." Jahve, though remaining as God of the universe, a just deity, becomes again the special God of Israel, therefore a partial one. He promises to heap all possible prosperity on Israel, as a bribe to it to remain faithful to him; and infidelity to him is to be punished by death. This part of the new code has never been surpassed even by the code of the Dominican inquisition in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Here again was a relapse from the old Elohim to the old Jahve.

With the capture of Samaria by the Assyrians (B.C. 721), the kingdom of Israel disappeared, leaving the kingdom of Judah, the inhabitants generally of which may now be called Jews. With the capture of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (B.C. 588) came the final captivity of the Jews, and their exile to Babylon. Ezekiel was among the exiles who confidently expected a restoration, with a view to which was formed the book known as Leviticus, "full of formalism and fanaticism," as usual ascribed to Moses, and inspired by Ezekiel, as Deuteronomy had been inspired by Jeremiah. But a far greater prophet of the captivity than Ezekiel was the unnamed one whom Renan calls the second Isaiah—the real author of Chapters xl.-lxvi. of the prophetic book ascribed to Hezekiah's Isaiah. To the second Isaiah, Jahve, the God who made the heavens and the earth, takes a very special interest in the Jews, and assigns to them the religious primacy of the nations. But ultimately he is to bring to the worship of himself all the people that on earth do dwell. "*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth. I have sworn by myself that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.*" Renan opines that in the second Isaiah, "the thought of Israel reaches the greatest height that it has ever attained."

With the restoration of the Jews, and the building of a new temple at Jerusalem, the compilation of the Book of the Law, such as we now have it in the Pentateuch, was in all essential respects completed, and once more Jahve was substituted for Elohim in the national worship. "The second Isaiah," says Renan, "had hoped for something very

different. His Jerusalem, open day and night to receive the nations, had nothing in common with that little shut-in Jerusalem to which no one could be admitted without all sorts of formalities. The idealist seer would have been very much astonished if he had been told that, to sacrifice to Jahve on Sion, circumcision was a necessary preliminary." For more than two centuries the Jewish nation slept a deep sleep under the influence of the soporific administered to it in the form of the Law. The very completeness of their servitude to the Law roused them, however, to revolt, when Antiochus Epiphanes crowned his persecution of the Jews by polluting the temple at Jerusalem. Renan traces to this heroic struggle under the Maccabæans the origin of a Jewish belief in rewards and punishments after death. Hitherto the Jews had been taught that loyalty to Jahve would bring them worldly prosperity; none of their teachers or prophets had promised them a recompense beyond the grave. If they had been punished in this life, it was for their sins, or the sins of their fathers. But how were they now sinning in shedding their blood for the sake of their religion? They saw apostates rewarded and the faithful subjected to the most frightful punishments for not denying their faith. The first distinct and emphatic expression in any Jewish writing of a belief in a future state of rewards and punishments, is found in the so-called Book of Daniel. Three centuries before, Ezekiel had spoken of an apparently mythical Daniel as a wise and righteous man, worthy of being ranked with Noah and Job. A pious Jew of the time of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, assumed the name of Daniel to encourage his suffering country-

men by writing of what he feigned that Daniel had suffered, during the captivity, along with a mystical prophecy, which foreshadows among other things the ultimate triumph of the Jews. In this book (Chapter xii. 2) of the pseudo-Daniel stand written the memorable words: "*Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*" In time the faith thus expressed became that of many Jews, the Sadducees rejecting it. As a dogma it was accepted in spirit by the Founder of Christianity, and became one of the corner-stones of the Christian religion. No Jews, however, believed in the necessary immortality of the soul. For them a life after death was a mark of special favour to reward the good, or of special reprobation to punish the bad. The Jews did not believe in a soul apart from the body, hence their doctrine of the resurrection, and those of the resurgents who were to be rewarded were to enjoy themselves, not in heaven, but on earth. Christianity in the third century combined the doctrine of the resurrection of the body with the Platonic belief in the immortality of the soul. In Renan's opinion the dominant belief of the actual Christian, especially of a spiritualist, is generally in the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body is kept out of sight and mind. To the Maccabæan age also belong, according to Renan, the quasi-monastic Essenes, strict among the strictest followers of the law (although they substituted offerings for sacrifices in the Temple of Jerusalem), and carrying their asceticism so far as to prohibit marriage, except under very singular conditions. The superficial resemblance between

Essenianism and Christian monasticism has produced a theory that the latter sprang out of the former, but Renan will not allow the slightest influence to have been exerted by the much earlier Essenes on the founders of Christianity, who were probably ignorant of their existence.

The capture of Jerusalem by Pompey (B.C. 63) ended the Asmonæan dynasty founded by Jonathan, brother of Judas Maccabæus, and Palestine became a Roman province, very tolerably administered. It is to this time that Renan now assigns the composition of Ecclesiastes, from which it is evident that the belief in a life beyond the grave was not held by a writer who may be regarded as a type of the educated and thoughtful Jew of that age. The new dogma of the resurrection, and of rewards and punishments after death, was accepted by the Pharisees, who were the well-to-do *bourgeois* of Jerusalem, strict followers of the law, carrying the people with them. To the wealthy official and hierarchical classes belonged the Sadducees, worldly, sceptical, who rejected the doctrines of the resurrection and made the most of life on this side of the grave.

Towards the end of the work Renan gives a vivid account of the character and career of Herod the Great, whose reign in Palestine recalled, in its purely profane splendour, that of Solomon himself. Renan compares him to Mehemet Ali, but acquits him of the legendary massacre of the innocents: "Jesus was only born four years after Herod's death." The History of Israel closes with an interesting passage, in which, nearly thirty years after the appearance of the *Vie de Jésus*, Renan

makes the emphatic asseveration:—"After constant reflection I persist in thinking that the general physiognomy of Jesus was such as it is represented in the Synoptic Gospels." Whatever Renan may have thought earlier, Christianity, as well as Judaism, he now declares, will disappear, but in the course of thousands of years they have given birth to the cardinal phenomenon of our age, Socialism.

"Judaism and Christianity represent in antiquity what Socialism is in modern times. Socialism will not definitely carry all before it. Freedom, with what follows from it, will remain the law of the world. But the freedom of each will be purchased at the expense of considerable concessions made to all. Social questions will no longer be suppressed; they will more and more take precedence of political and national questions."

Surely this last is a prophecy in course of fulfilment.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

THE final chapter of the History of Israel had for heading the statement and pious exclamation, *Finito Libro, sit Laus et Gloria Christo*, and at the end, "Finished the 24th October 1891." The fifth and last volume, of which, it is too evident, Renan had not seen the proofs, was not published until 1894, when its author was no more. He was suffering acutely, and more or less continuously throughout the years during which he was working at the History of Israel. At the beginning of 1892 he knew that his condition was hopeless. During a midsummer visit to Brittany he rallied a little, but feeling much worse he decided to return to Paris and die, since he must die, at his post in the Collège de France. During his last months he suffered agony so terrible as sometimes to deprive him of the power of speech, but to the end he was gentle and kind to all around him, and assured them that he was happy. He often said to them that death is nothing, that he did not fear it, and congratulated himself on having reached threescore years and ten, the Psalmist's normal limit of life. He had wished to meet death with

his faculties unimpaired, and his wish was granted. On the very day of his death he dictated a page of an essay on Arabian architecture. One of his last wishes was that the poor of Rosmapanon should be remembered, and among his last words to his devoted wife were these: "Let us submit to the laws of that nature of which we are one of the manifestations. The heavens and the earth abide." He died at the Collège de France on the 2nd October 1892, a few days before our own Tennyson, whom he knew and duly admired.

The Government and the Chamber rightly decided that a state-funeral should be given to him who at the time of his death was at the head of the serious literature of France. Within the court of the Collège de France, which was draped in black, were grouped official dignitaries, representing the President of the Republic; judges were there with members of the French Academy, representatives of the university, of the chief learned and scientific bodies of France, of the diplomatic body. Without, to accompany the *catafalque* to the cemetery of Montmartre, where Renan's remains were deposited in the Scheffer family vault, was an escort of troops of all arms, as befitted one among whose distinctions was that of having been a Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour. Afterwards the French Chamber decreed that the remains of Renan, with those of Michelet and Quinet, should be transferred to the Pantheon, which, as a resting-place for the remains of famous men, is at once the Westminster Abbey and the St. Paul's of France. Mirabeau was its first tenant.

The life of no eminent Frenchman presents a more

stainless record than that of Renan. He began his active career by nobly sacrificing his prospects of worldly advancement to his convictions, and from entire devotion to them he never swerved. He lived the frugal, indefatigable, laborious life of scholars of the olden time, while, unlike most of them, he was conspicuous in the gravest controversies, religious, intellectual, and political, of an age of intense conflict in every sphere of thought and action. Ever speaking his mind freely on the chief topics, sacred and profane, passionately debated in his day and generation, he aroused the fiercest and most merciless of all antagonisms, that inspired by the *odium theologicum*. But to none of his orthodox assailants did he ever reply; from his own vivid remembrance of his youthful devotion to the orthodox creed he could understand and pardon the enmity which his frankness drew upon him. Only once, and then playfully and almost indirectly, did he deign to refer to absurd calumnies reflecting on his personal honour, with which he had been assailed by some infuriated scribes of the clerical press. There is one characteristic of Renan, as a writer on an absorbing theme of his time, which it seems to me has been overlooked even by his French panegyrists, although indeed it is of a kind which naturally perhaps induced them to ignore it. Unlike several of his most famous contemporaries among French men of letters, although deeply attached to his country, deeply alive to what was glorious in its history, and keenly appreciating the graceful and brilliant qualities of his countrymen, he never flattered them, he never indulged in that exaggerated glorification of France and the French to which

Victor Hugo was so prone, and which, by stimulating the national vanity and turning the national head, has been most pernicious to the people which greedily swallowed the adulation offered it. No Frenchman ever lamented more than Renan all that was involved in, and that followed on, the cataclysm of Sedan. But he did what was better and more useful than shed tears, he pointed out to his countrymen the faults of character and conduct that had brought on them their terrible disasters, and he preached to them the austere and painful discipline of self-reform, in which alone their recovery lay.

Renan was often inconsistent, but his inconsistency was never the offspring of opportunism, or exhibited with an eye to his own interest. Under the Second Empire he freely criticised Imperialism, under the Third Republic, Republicanism. Though he sometimes hankered after it, an active and personal part in political life was denied him, perhaps fortunately, since his insight and independence would not have allowed him to attach himself ardently to any party in France which had a chance of exercising authority or influencing legislation. But there was one sphere of usefulness in which, from his character, position, and reputation, he was fitted and able to do good. He pleaded persistently for a reform of the higher and highest education of France, for more freedom in its organisation, more elasticity in its methods, for the expansion of the substantial and the serious in its programme, and the displacement of the merely rhetorical and showy. It seems that much that he advocated in this way has been adopted by the Third

Republic, which he looked on with no great favour and some suspicion. Before he died he was able to congratulate France on the development of an historical school, earnest, studious, and accurate, which owed much to his efforts and example.

In spite of the seemingly rather reckless levity which is exhibited in some of his later writings, Renan's morality was stainless. "Every one," says his personal friend, Sir M. E. Grant Duff, "who knows anything about him at all, knows that his conduct from birth to death was simply that of a saint—a saint whose opinions may have been as detestable as possible, but who, even if judged by the teachings of the Galilean lake, was still a saint." He modestly charged himself with not sufficiently endeavouring to promote the interests of others; but those who knew him declare him to have been one of the most friendly and helpful of men. All who have been in his company speak enthusiastically of the fascination of his manner and his conversation. M. G. Monod describes his manner as "having something of the paternal affability of the priest; the benedictory gesture of his plump and dimpled hands, and the approving motion of the head, were indications of an urbanity which never deceived, and in which one felt the nobility of his nature and his race." One peculiarity of his conversation was very characteristic of the man. He hated controversy in private as in public, and has recorded in his *Souvenirs* his habit of agreeing with his interlocutor rather than engage in discussion. In this he was very different from Dr. Johnson, who, Sir Frederick Pollock says, "would have execrated Renan's books if he could have read

them, and opened his arms to Renan himself after five minutes' conversation, if they could have met. It was the utmost refinement of performance on a fine instrument, and without any stiffness or artificial display. Renan's speech might be said to revive the Homeric simile of words falling even as snow-flakes. It was uniform, continuous, soft, and yet brilliant; every part was crystalline, and seemed to have its place in the whole by a sort of inevitable felicity." Renan's personal appearance could scarcely be called prepossessing. An American visitor to him at the Collège de France, in the year preceding his decease, describes him seated at his desk:—"rotund and episcopal, his hands crossed over his shapeless body, from which the large head emerges, rosy and silvery, the face broad, with big features, a great nose, enormous cheeks heavily modelled in abundant flesh, a delicate and mobile mouth, and grey Celtic eyes."[1]

Renan's opinions on the purely human origin of Christianity and Judaism, and on the legendary character of much of the Bible, bear so near an affinity to those with which the world has been familiar for more than a century, that his heterodoxy may offend some but can scarcely startle any. Doubtless it is otherwise in the case of his daring expeditions into the infinite of the unknown and the unknowable. His "thoughts that wander through eternity" contrast with the general sobriety of English philosophical speculation, even that of our most advanced thinkers. The nearest approach to Renan's high-soaring conjectures on ontology and the ultimate destiny of man, is to be found in John Stuart Mill's

[1] Theodore Child in *Harper's Magazine*, vol. xxiv., 1892.

posthumous essays on religion, though his mild surmises are far, very far, transcended in aim and scope by Renan's audacious hypotheses. These are dreams, but the dreams of a man of genius, whose mind from youth onwards had been constantly exercised by problems which agnosticism pronounces to be insoluble on this side the grave, and very naturally declines to handle. But surely, though to be regarded of course merely as conjectures, Renan's are interesting, as showing how the greatest of possibilities appeared to the intellect and imagination of such a mind as his. He was not, and did not pretend to be, a systematic thinker. Indeed his philosophy seems to have partaken of the *fieri* which he loved to discover in the universe. Here again, therefore, the reader will find Renan sometimes inconsistent, affirming what he has contradicted and contradicting what he has affirmed. But in the end, as at the outset, whatever his temporary aberrations, Renan is seen holding fast to the faith of his youth, that good is for ever good, and evil for ever evil, that truth must be sought and goodness followed at all hazards, so that we may not fail to co-operate in carrying out the ultimate aim of existence, the triumph of good over evil. In a fine essay on Renan's friend, the late M. James Darmesteter, whom France and its highest literature have recently lost, M. Gaston Paris admirably describes Renan's as a "complex and even deceptive nature," which, while "infinitely mobile on the surface, beneath the varying play of light and shade" is nevertheless "unchanging in its depths."[1]

[1] *Contemporary Review* for January 1895.

In the survey, necessarily incomplete, of Renan's multifarious writings, I have ventured, so far as I could without presumption, to express occasional opinions on his manner and on his matter. In point of style and treatment Renan is, by all those who are competent to judge, acknowledged to be one of the most consummate of modern literary artists. Moreover, for the work which he had to perform, the interpretation to modern Europe of the great religions which have moulded the world, from his combination of vast learning with the widest sympathies, his fitness was unique. He brought to bear on the subjects of the two greatest of his works, the histories of early Christianity and Judaism, not only genius, erudition, patient labour, lynx-eyed vigilance of research, a penetrating intellect which rejected the supernatural in the history of man — Gibbon had all these—but also what Gibbon had not—a deep religious sentiment, which survived the dogmatic faith of Renan's childhood and youth, and enabled him to reverence, almost to worship, as the highest ideal of humanity, the Founder of Christianity, to sympathise with and therefore to understand the prophets and psalmists of Israel, the Christian apostles, martyrs, and mediæval saints, the Protestant and Puritan reformers,—while declaring that the creed of all of them had ceased to be valid for the man of the second half of the nineteenth century. If inevitable limitations of space had not forbidden, I should have liked to linger over those works of which so rigorous a critic as Edmond Scherer declared that, as the poet Gray considered it to be the height of felicity to lie on a

sofa and read new volumes of Crebillon and Marivaux, so it was his, with or without the sofa, to have new volumes of Renan given him to read. I have been able to bestow only an occasional glance at the contents of Renan's miscellanies, but those of my readers hitherto ignorant of them who may resolve to make their acquaintance, will find themselves in a new world replete with all that is attractive, interesting, instructive, from the life-like description of Mahomet, mending his own garments in intervals of prophecy, to charming gossip about the *Journal des Débats* and its contributors under the Second Empire, or touching anecdotes of heroism in humble French life, told by Renan when awarding, in the name of the French Academy, the Monthyon prizes of virtue. Renan, of course, has his defects. One of them is a certain softness of mental fibre which leads him to exalt the contemplative over the active life, to prefer this and the other meek and meditative ascetic to such a commanding personality as that of the fiery and energetic apostle of the Gentiles. In his intense desire to realise the persons who figure in his great histories he sometimes transforms conjecture into positive and emphatic affirmation; and M. de Mezières, in his address of welcome to Renan on his admission to the French Academy, gently reminded him that out of a single adjective he had evolved quite an elaborate character of the evangelist Luke. But Carlyle's favourite virtue, veracity, is eminently Renan's. Everywhere in his writings you see a man straining to give a faithful picture of what he has to describe, an impartial estimate of the character which he is portraying. He affirmed of himself,

not only that he never said anything that he did not believe to be true, but that he always said everything that he did believe to be true. Fontenelle declared that if he had his hand full of truth he would only open his little finger. This was not Renan's mode of proceeding, and his frankness sometimes gave offence to his friends. But veracity, like charity, covers a multitude of sins, and, compared with the amount and range of his writings, his sins in speech were few in number. Do we not crave above all things from a gifted man, working in Renan's intellectual sphere, that he shall tell us what he really and truly thinks and feels, whether the world likes it or not? This Renan did throughout life, and the themes on which he spoke were often the most delicate and difficult, the most controversial, as well as the loftiest that can occupy the human mind. Never was there a man of letters and of genius, writing much on the deepest problems of religion and philosophy, on human destiny and its relation to the infinite, who could more justly than Renan claim to have for his epitaph the all-including words, *Veritatem dilexi*—I have loved truth.

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